

Sermon Transcript – A Living Hope (SC)

11/6/23

Title: *Joy and Confidence*

Passage: 1 Peter 1:1-9

Here is a conversation each of us has had a thousand times since the pandemic: it is when we reflect on the past three years, and remember the rule of 6, social distancing at 1 meter+, that we say to ourselves – “it feels more like a lifetime ago than our recent history.” Have you found yourself saying that? – or perhaps when we try to recount the sequence of events, we say “my memory of the pandemic is all a bit of a blur!” And perhaps our recollections are hazy because it was such an extraordinary chapter of our national life, of our church life, so it feels more like events that took place in a parallel universe than right here in our own community.

And it is with that sense of nostalgia, of trying to recall the past, that I want to transport you back to another curious episode of history. You see, for the next few weeks, we will be reading through the apostle Peter’s first letter in the New Testament. And Peter was writing to the Christian communities in what is now modern-day Turkey during a time of relative hardship. But what Peter’s first readers didn’t know, just as we didn’t know back in January/February 2020, was just how tough things were going to get.

Just as we couldn’t have known about the enormity of the pandemic just weeks before the first lockdown, so the communities of 1st Century Turkey couldn’t have known just how fierce Emperor Nero’s persecution of Christians would become in the space of just a few short years.

And we turn to 1 Peter, not because we believe society at large will become equally as hostile toward the Christian faith, but rather because the letter addresses a worshipping community in a similar cultural situation to our own, when there is a seeming widening gulf between Christian and secular culture; where being a Christian in the workplace, or the public square, or the school gate, feels more uncomfortable than perhaps it used to. We turn to 1 Peter, to ask, what does it mean and look like to be a Christian disciple, right here, right now, in our corner of the world?

And the apostle Peter’s message of encouragement, for whatever the future may hold, highlights the present and future hope of the Christian faith. Peter wishes to remind these communities, to remind us, that the gospel is Good News now and for the future. And it’s this interplay between the present and the future, between the hope that is now, and the hope that is to come that we will begin to explore this morning.

And so let’s turn to the passage, 1 Peter 1:3.

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

So why is the gospel Good News in the present? - because it gives us a living hope. And a living hope is not a longing for the way things used to be, or a vague hope that things might turn out differently in future. But a living hope, means a new life. Because Jesus Christ lives, he is our living hope, and he gives new life, *his* life, to his people. So, just how “new” do you feel?

Now the “newness” of the spiritual life of faith will be illustrated in a moment with Marion’s baptism. This is an exciting moment. But as I read this verse, and sensed the palpable joy Peter has for the living hope through the resurrection, it made me think, have I lost something of the “newness” of the baptised life? Have the challenges we face, taken the sheen off the excitement we used to feel about being a disciple of Jesus Christ?

So, here’s our first challenge from 1 Peter. We should pray that we can recapture the excitement of the Christian life. That we might recapture the joy of being born into a living hope.

But why then is the gospel good news for the future? Well let’s read on:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,⁴ and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you,⁵ who through faith are shielded by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.

The Gospel is good news because it gives us a living hope in the present, and an imperishable inheritance for the future.

One of the things I have sensed about the witness of the national church in the last 15 years or so, is that we seem to talk about the future with less confidence. Perhaps, we feel that our belief in the resurrection and what it means for the future will somehow seem awkward or embarrassing in our increasingly secular setting. Maybe, in the midst of the pandemic, we just needed to be reminded that on the Cross, Jesus is immediately present to our suffering.

But perhaps now is a good time to be reminded that in Christ we have “an inheritance that can never spoil, perish, or fade.” Perhaps now is a good time to be reminded that God’s love is eternal, and that should shape our perspective on the present. To say that Jesus is the “resurrection and the life” is to proclaim that we have an everlasting hope, an ever-living hope. To be a Christian is, as the creed we will say in a moment’s time declares, to believe in the resurrection of the dead, and the life everlasting.

So challenge 1, we pray for a renewed joy in the Christian life.

Challenge 2: we ask ourselves, just how seriously do I take those lines in the Creed: ‘I believe in the resurrection of the dead and the life everlasting’?

So, as we give thought to the challenges Christians face in our country, in our places of industry, education, as we think about the challenges we face as individuals, be that with our health, finances, relationships, remember: in Christ we have a living hope in the present, and an imperishable inheritance for the future.

May the Holy Spirit renew our joy in the Christian life and renew our confidence in the resurrection.

Amen.