

Glorious hope

Readings: 2 Corinthians 5:1 – 10, Luke 20:27 - 38

*All this pain
I wonder if I'll ever find my way
I wonder if my life could really change at all
All this earth
Could all that is lost ever be found?
Could a garden come up from this ground at all?"*

These are the opening lyrics from a Christian group called Gungor.

Do you feel like that? Does it ever feel like everything is dry, dying, maybe even dead? It's all dark and you can't see the way ahead? Is this all there is? Surely there must be more?

We all have those feelings at times. Usually they are fleeting.

But for some those feelings don't go away – they become part of the landscape. Listen to this excerpt:

Beyond the gated communities and success of booming property, there is a black splinter that pierces the soul of the NZ psyche that we refuse to raise for fear of what it will reveal.

Our under funded social infrastructure, our 'me first' consumerism, our 30 years of neoliberal mythology, our disconnection from one another, our untreated pain, our lack of hope from grinding poverty in a first world country, our toxic masculinity, our unspoken rape culture, our inability to express emotion beyond anger – all of this demands questions we don't want to hear as a society

297 people died on NZ roads in 2014, 564 people took their own lives in that time.¹

During my childhood my mother, who was often a desperately unhappy woman, would sing a song by Peggy Lee. The chorus goes like this:

*Is that all there is?
If that's all there is my friends
Then let's keep dancing
Let's break out the booze and have a ball
If that's all there is²*

According to Statistics NZ 80.7% of people in Tasman rate their life satisfaction as 7 out of 10. In Nelson it is 78.7% ³

¹ - See more at: <http://thedailyblog.co.nz/2015/10/06/nz-suicide-rate-skyrockets-to-highest-rate-ever-recorded/#sthash.X4UyOrRU.dpuf>

² 'Is That All There Is?' originally by Dan Daniels

How would you rate your life satisfaction? On a scale of 1 – 10, 1 being very low and 10 being ‘completely satisfied with your life’ where would you be?

I’m not sure anyone would say they are a ‘10’. And perhaps we shouldn’t even want a 10 in this life.

The apostle Paul talked about his life satisfaction levels in chapter 4 of 2 Corinthians.

V 8 – 9 We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.

Paul was trying to explain that his outward circumstances were not good and yet somehow he didn’t lose heart v 16

Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.

Paul knew that this life was not all there is. He knew that he would suffer and die but that better things were to come. v17 - 18

For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

We all need hope. Life is hard for all of us at times. Life is hard for many of us right now. It would be easy for us to feel guilty about that, especially in the light of what has happened in Paris. Life is comparatively easy for us – we have the necessities of life. We don’t suffer persecution. We don’t have to flee our houses, our country, in fear of our lives.

But still Some we love live with health issues – physical and mental health issues. Some are struggling financially. Relationships are not all they are cracked up to be. We ourselves may well be facing some of those things right now.

As Christians, we sometimes have a dodgy theology that says, we should be above those things. Living the victorious Christian life means we should be healed.

Sometimes the Lord heals. Sometimes he doesn’t. And it’s not because we are not worthy of healing. It’s not because we don’t have enough faith. It’s not because our parents or grandparents sinned.

Sometimes we aren’t healed and we really struggle. And we don’t know why. We just don’t know. Because we are not God.

And so we put one foot in front of the other, when we don’t think we can. We do the next thing that needs to be done, even when we are sure we can’t do that thing.

³ http://www.stats.govt.nz/browse_for_stats/people_and_communities/Well-being/across-regions/self-rated-well-being-2014.aspx

Christians face all the same issues that others do, and more. Because there is an enemy who wants to bring us down.

We need hope. Paul recognises that when he talks about our present groaning in chapter 5.

V2 *Meanwhile we groan*

V4 *... while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened*

Paul is saying that it is part of the human condition to be dissatisfied with what we have now. We are incomplete and unfulfilled even if we know Jesus Christ in the here and now. The Lord's purposes are not yet complete in us.

His purpose is that death is defeated and life eternal reigns in us and in his world. We know this deep down. We understand that this life cannot possibly be all there is. We have a God-shaped vacuum. That vacuum includes our longing for the promised age to come.

We do have hints of this. Paul again in 5:5:

Now the one who has fashioned us for this very purpose (ie eternal life) is God, who has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.

So what is to come? What will the resurrected life be like?

There are lots of things we could say here. In the interests of time though I only want to highlight two points.

Our thinking is so limited isn't it? We try to figure things out according to human logic. We think we are so smart but our logic pales into ridiculousness at times. We see this with the farcical situation the Sadducees brought to Jesus.

They didn't even believe in eternal life and yet they were apparently trying to figure out what resurrection life would be like. The best they could come up with is "Who will this widow be married to in heaven after she has had seven husbands?" Duh!

In this instance Jesus is patience personified. I would've called them idiots or something stronger. But Jesus responds to their question with a sensible answer:

V 35 ... those who are considered worthy of taking part in the age to come and in the resurrection from the dead will neither marry nor be given in marriage ...

Often at funerals someone from the family will say "Mum will be with Dad at last now." It can bring great comfort. There is nothing in Scripture to say that is not true. But relationships will be different. Relationships will be way different to what they are now – richer, more fulfilled, better than sex!

1. In the age to come we will be love and be loved unconditionally. That is how God loves and we will see "face to face" (1 Cor 13) at that time.

Dr Sinead Donnelly, a palliative care doctor came to our parish a few years back and offered training to our pastoral carers. She writes:

Every day I spend hours with people who are facing death, whose greatest need in my experience is to be truly heard, truly listened to, not abandoned emotionally or physically. People yearn so much to receive care unconditionally.⁴

2. Another really important thing about the age to come is that it is not away in some ethereal space we like to call heaven.

Revelation 21:1 - 4

Then I saw "a new heaven and a new earth," for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

It does matter how we treat this earth. It is our inheritance. It is where God will dwell. On this planet there will be no more tears nor death nor mourning nor crying nor pain! In the midst of terrorism and inhumanity we can have hope.

We are children of the resurrection, because we get to share in Jesus' resurrection. No matter how much we groan now, resurrection is coming. Jesus has paved the way for his followers. Nicky Gumbel, of Alpha fame, reminds us that

The resurrection of Jesus is rooted in history, grounded in scripture and confirmed in experience.

So here is another question:

Is Jesus' resurrection confirmed in your experience; your daily experience?

If it's not there could be several reasons for that:

- You might be clinically unwell – if that is you, please listen carefully to your medical advisors and to follow their advice.
- You might not yet be a Jesus follower – if that you, and you'd like to be, then talk to a Christian you trust about how to become one.
- You might be simply be going through a difficult stage where life is complicated – we all do that.
- You might be forgetting to make the daily choice – choose life, choose hope, choose Jesus each day.

Jesus promises that we will not die. He reminds us who God is:

Lk 20:38 *He (God) is not the God of the dead but of the living...*

⁴ <https://www.nzma.org.nz/journal/read-the-journal/all-issues/2010-2019/2012/vol-125-no-1366/letter-donnelly>

In any circumstance– we can choose to hold on to the hope of resurrection and of life eternal. It is a choice that needs to be taken daily. Paul said that because of the Holy Spirit guarantee of what is to come, he lived by faith and not by sight. And that his main aim was to please the Lord on earth and in the age to come.

Gungor continue their song with these lyrics:

You make beautiful things
You make beautiful things out of the dust
You make beautiful things
You make beautiful things out of us

All around
Hope is springing up from this old ground
Out of chaos life is being found in You

It is no coincidence that this last point brings us to the end of the Apostles' Creed - I believe in the ... "the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen"