

Maintaining hope

1 Corinthians 15:1 – 10, Mat 25:34 – 40

So today is my final day in Richmond Parish. Thank you so much to everyone who has made the effort to come – especially those of you who don't usually worship here.

St Alban's folk: huge gratitude from me to you for closing down your own service to be here! Folk from the wider community – I hope today isn't too freaky for you. Maybe you'll find that this church, while a bit weird, can be an alright place after all. My prayer for all of us is that we don't just focus on me but on God our Father. I've tried to point to Jesus in everything even though I haven't always used lots of God language.

This church is a place of great diversity. Many of us have different ideas about faith and church and life and pretty much everything really.

Maybe not quite everything. We all believe in God, in his Son Jesus, and in the Holy Spirit. This church is called Holy Trinity because those three persons/substances/personalities make up the God we know.

In the wider, NZ Aotearoa and Pacific Anglican world right now, there is a lot of argument about what we are supposed to believe. There is argument about the Bible – what is to be taken literally and what isn't. How do we know which bits are for now? Like many I take the view that the love of God, displayed in Jesus Christ, is the absolute key to everything.

I agree with the apostle Paul who wrote that the matter of first importance was:

that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,

I think most people would agree that Jesus embodies the message of the Bible. His life, teachings, death and resurrection are the absolute central beliefs.

In Jesus we see the love and life of God. And what Jesus says goes. All of Jesus' life was taken up reaching out to others – especially those that the in-crowd or religious lot didn't approve of.

Jesus reinterpreted the Old Testament Scriptures so that the underlying message of love was what was lived out.

If you want to take the Bible literally I should not be ordained.

I am a woman.

My husband doesn't usually attend church.

Some of you might not consider my children to be Christian.

I overeat – deliberately.

Taking the Bible literally means I shouldn't be ordained.

Two Bishop's and their advisors took a generous view of Scripture though. So I've been here in this church 10 and a half years; the last 7 as your Vicar.

The Parish Nominators (the dudes who select the Vicar) took a generous view too. They thought we could work well together and the last decade has been amazing!

Through you all, church and wider community, I have felt welcomed, respected, loved. Thank you. Together we have grown together in the Lord and in our outreach.

And from here on you will continue to grow. Our theme today is Maintaining Hope. My prayer for you all is that you will do just that.

Anne Lamott's has written a book entitled "Almost Everything". She writes:

"So I set out to share, through my writing, almost everything I know that gives me hope, because hope is medicine, and water, buoyancy, and the way home."

My hope for you is that the hope you have in Christ, in each other, gives you the ability to reach out to others even when you don't feel like it.

Recently I heard of someone who came to church looking for a cup of coffee. He didn't want to come to a service or to meet with other people. He just wanted a coffee. As a church we are learning to take those opportunities to serve.

We don't always get it right. That's okay. We are human.

But we, you, are on a journey where everyone is welcome to participate as much or as little as they want. Stay on the path the Lord has set for you.

Jesus told a story about the end of the age. He will say:

I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'

"Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'

"The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'

I read a fb post recently. It said something like this:

When every person has enough to eat, when everyone has a roof over their head, when everyone has meaningful employment, when everyone enjoys the respect of others – then, and only then, can you argue about religion.

I'm with Jesus. I'm with the nameless fb person. Please don't now take a narrow view of Scripture. Please take a generous view and maintain the hope that there is in Jesus.

Seize the life he promised when he said:

"I am come that they might have life and that life abundantly."

Thank you for your generosity towards me. Please be equally generous to others – people who may not currently fit inside the box as you understand it. They are often the hope bearers who will make all the difference. They are often the ones who enable hope to flourish.

