



Sermon

The Indispensable Need

John 20:19-31

26th April, 2020

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If you have been listening to the sermons over the past few weeks, one clear theme is hope. Both Ian and Roy have pointed us towards the Biblical truth that no matter what is happening to us as individuals, as a Church, or as a Nation, there is still a sovereign God overseeing all that is going on. As the hymn writer says, "God is working His purpose out as year succeeds to year." There could not be a clearer message nor a more appropriate time to give it, a time of crisis in our world and the celebration of Easter in the Church.

What I want to explore today is the basis for that hope. Why can we in the face of tragedy still say this is not the final word.

As the two disciples walked home to Emmaus, they too were facing a crisis. The one they had thought to be the Messiah, because He had demonstrated this in His powerful words backed up by signs and wonders that continually stunned the disciples, was now DEAD. How could this be?

As they walk with the stranger who joins them in the journey, they are surprised that he appears to be ignorant of all that has happened. So, they tell him and finish their story with these tragic words, "But we had hoped..."

There is no greater destroyer of hope than death. It puts a full stop on everything. And Jesus was dead! All reason for hope had been snuffed out on Friday afternoon.

We are like these disciples. In our culture death is the great taboo. We make sure that we have a bucket list so that we can do all the things that death will put an end to. There is no thought that what is ahead is greater than what we have experienced now. There may be some kind of after life, but we are not at all certain what it will be like other than a vague hope, that things will be "better", whatever "better" means. Contrast this with St Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 2: 9 "no eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love Him."

The disciples on the road to Emmaus knew none of this but they are about to discover what Paul is talking about in the next verse when he writes, "But God has revealed it to us by His Spirit."

It is revealed to them in the greatest Bible study the world has ever known!

Their response once they have seen the risen Lord is, "Were our hearts not burning within us while He talked with us on the road and opened the scriptures to us?" Hope begins to blossom again.

God had revealed to them what He also revealed to all His disciples. Suffering and death were necessary for the Messiah. Only in that way could the "The last great enemy," (1 Cor 15:26) be defeated.

As C S Lewis puts it in his Narnia story "The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe", "When a willing victim who had committed no treachery was killed in a traitors stead, the Stone Table would crack and death would start working backwards."

Or St Paul again, "Death has been swallowed up in Victory. Where O death is your victory? Where O death is your sting? The sting of death is sin and the power of sin is the Law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

This, the two disciples learned directly from the Master Himself. No wonder that they hurried back to the others to tell them what they had learned.

The greatest destroyer of hope has itself been defeated! All of life was changed.

In our world when earth-shattering things happen, they almost always bring consistent and ongoing fear. Hiroshima, 9/11/, Covid 19 have all changed our world. But each of them brought fear.

Not so with the Resurrection of Jesus. It begins with the natural fear that we humans have of anything we don't understand. But then takes us on a journey through fear to hope.

For the next forty days Jesus gives "many convincing proofs" (Acts 1: 3) to them and teaches about the Kingdom of God. Life has now changed. The world is a different place. No matter what happens they know this truth and through that truth have been given new Hope. God's promises to Israel will be fulfilled.

There is always more than this life can offer. If suffering should come, they will learn to rejoice despite it because there is a Sovereign God Who is working His purpose out. If death should come it will not come with the last word but will usher us into the nearer presence of God to await the final consummation of all things.

What will that hope look like when it is fulfilled? The clearest vision of it is seen in the life of Jesus the sinless human being. Jesus had complete control over all things. He has control over nature. It does His bidding. He has control over disease and banished it wherever He went. He had control over the evil spiritual realm. He had control over His own destiny; when He died it was because He chose to do so. (John 10: 17-18)

The major thing that our Lord's life death resurrection and ascension show is that what is to happen in the future has begun now. "All authority in heaven and earth has been given to Me. Go, therefore." The sovereign God has once again proved His faithfulness. In the midst of uncertainty and when all is danger and hopelessness God is still trustworthy.

Tomorrow is Monday and we must return to the world in which we live. We will leave the wonder of worship where we met with the people of God and experienced again His presence with us where the wonders of our Faith are made real to us again.

What difference does it make to you THERE that you are a believer? The world is very happy for you to belong to a Church and believe what you do as long as it does not impinge on them, as long as it makes no demands or challenges.

But what if you begin to behave differently? What if it is perceived that your attitude to the current crisis is just a bit different from theirs? What if we do the best that we can to eradicate this scourge from among us and yet the world as we know it is changed forever? What if the way in which we walk through that world is tinged with hope?

The Easter story tells us that there is always reason to hope. We can still confidently trust because God is alive and at work in His world even if the world is turned upside down by this or any other crisis. The world needs a reason to hope. We can show them that there is.