5 September 2010 – Our Living Hope

Our Living Hope

[1 Peter 1:3-9]

Thank-you to our preachers over the last 4 Sundays: Marcus, Bijoy, Chai & David.

2 sermons for the start of the church year & before we take up our series in Acts once again:

1. Our Living Hope
2. Living Our Hope

READ: 1 Peter 1:3-9

We were away for Bryn and Shaheen’s wedding – which was wonderful! Good to have times of celebration like that in the midst of difficulties, sadness and loss...

- In the first week that we were away we heard of the murders of 10 IAM personnel in Afghanistan. Jim and Lois Couch, friends of ours who came to Ch Mai at the same time as us and who were members here for 5 years, were the ones who raised the alarm when the party of 10 didn’t arrive as expected.
- In the second week I was told that the area where we lived and worked for 5 years is one of the most affected from the flooding & I was sent a video clip of the Dubair river that we lived beside in torrential flood & washing away a whole bazaar of shops / hotels / mosque & homes. 600 homes were destroyed in the area where we lived.
- In the third week, following a court appearance, my brother made the headlines of the local newspaper for all the wrong reasons – right in the area where my parents live.
- When we arrived back we heard that a neighbor of ours whom many of you know has cancer of the bone marrow and is about to undergo chemotherapy.
- ...and that is not all
  o → death, disaster, difficulty, sickness

It was into a situation of suffering and difficulty, death and the threat of death that Peter wrote: “Praise be 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 our Lord Jesus Christ...”

YES?! Don’t we need a living hope?
Peter had experienced the transforming power of hope in his life...

When Jesus was betrayed, tried and then executed as a common criminal on a Roman cross, all of Peter’s hopes and dreams were shattered – scattered in the mud that his bitter tears made as he wept into the Jerusalem dust. At a critical time, in a crucial test, he had failed; and when Jesus looked at him after he had denied him 3 times as predicted, Peter wept bitter tears of sorrow.

The dawn of a new day brought no hope, and with the crowing of the cockerels he just heard the echo of his own curses.

But Jesus did not stay dead! When Peter heard the bewildering message from the women who’d found the tomb empty, he ran there and saw it for himself. He left the empty tomb in wonder and amazement, and when Jesus appeared to the disciples in the upper room, when he saw the risen Jesus with the nail holes in his hands and his spear pierced side, hope was reborn in Peter’s heart:

- a living hope that came to understand the meaning of Jesus’ death – for in this same letter he writes:
  - “Jesus suffered for you…He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.”[1 Peter 2:21-25]
  - [Peter himself had been healed from his guilt; healed from his failure. Peter had been like a stray sheep –lost, alone and vulnerable, but had returned into the secure care of the Good Shepherd.]
- a living hope that came to understand the meaning of the resurrection – that Jesus rose from the grave, to the throne of heaven - the right hand of God.

The resurrection did much more than give back to Peter his Lord and Master, it demonstrated the great victory of Jesus over sin, death and separation from God,
  - For Peter
    - For those he was writing to
      - & for us

The resurrection meant that JESUS had been made both LORD and CHRIST
  - it meant that all authority in heaven and earth had been given to JESUS
  - it meant that all the purposes of God are going to be fulfilled through him
  - it meant that all judgment had been given to him and that through him God will bring order onto this chaotic and rebellious world
    - [and to people who are suffering, this final judgment shows that suffering does matter; that evil is unacceptable.]

Peter’s living hope is JESUS!
In the resurrection of Jesus the renewal of all things has begun; the promise of the renewal and restoration of all things has been set in motion, and our **new life in Christ** is the sure sign that God is at work, ...a work that is going to encompass the whole of creation – because the bible’s vision of the end of the world is of the coming of a new heaven and a new earth! “Therefore set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed.” [1 Pe 1:13]

Resurrection is about new life: "**In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ...**” [1 Peter 1:3]

Through the resurrection of Jesus God not only brought Jesus back to life but He has given us new life!

Through the resurrection all of us in the orphanage of life have been given the option of adoption!

So...........

- Our living hope is anchored in the past: JESUS rose!
- Our living hope remains in the present: JESUS lives!
- Our living hope is completed in the future: JESUS is coming!
- **Our living hope is JESUS and is as sure and definite as his resurrection!**

A good illustration of the past / future nature of the victory of Jesus’ resurrection is seen in World War 2. Victory was established in Europe on V.E. Day 1945 but historians look back to the Allied troops landing on the shores of Normandy on “D-Day” in 1944 as the day that secured that victory, the day that actually won the war more than a year later. So just as “D-Day” was the defining moment of the war in Europe, so Jesus resurrection from the dead was the defining moment that assures us of his coming victory for the whole of creation...and we live in this “in-between time” – this time between the victory being secured and the victory being established.

The American evangelist, Tony Campolo, describes a church meeting he once attended led by an old African-American pastor:

He started his sermon real softly by saying, “It was Friday; it was Friday and my Jesus was dead on the tree. But that was Friday, and Sunday's a’comin.!”

One of the deacons yelled, “Preach, brother, preach!”

It was all the encouragement he needed. He came on louder as he said, “It was Friday and Mary was cryin’ her eyes out. The disciples were running in every direction, like sheep without a shepherd… but that was Friday, and Sunday’s a’comin!”

The preacher kept going. He picked up the volume still more and shouted, “It was Friday. The cynics were lookin’ at the world and sayin’, “As things have been so shall they be. You can’t change nothin’ in this world; you can’t change any-thing!” But those cynics don't know that it was only Friday – and Sunday's a'comin! It was Friday, and on Friday those forces that oppress the poor and make the poor to suffer were in control. But that was Friday, and Sunday's a’comin!”
“It was Friday, and on Friday Pilate thought he had washed his hands of a lot of trouble. The Pharisees were strutin’ around and laughin’ and pokin’ each other in the ribs. They thought that they were back in charge of thing’s. But they didn’t know that it was only Friday! Sunday’s a’comin!’”

He kept on working that one phrase for half an hour… then an hour… then an hour and a quarter… then an hour and a half. Over and over he came at us, “It’s Friday, and Sunday is a’comin!” By the time he had come to the end of the message…he had me and everyone else so worked up that I don’t think any of us could have stood it much longer. At the end of his message he just yelled at the top of his lungs, “IT’S FRIDAY!” and all 500 of us in that church yelled back with one accord……………………

“AND SUNDAY’S A’COMIN!”

Whatever we hope for in the future has an impact on our lives today…The future reaches back to influence the present. This is what hope does:

When people have been through a tough experience or traumatic event they need to be told that they cannot change the past – what they can change is their response to the past, which is in the present. In turn this intervention may transform their future. The past can, in a sense, reach forward into the present and even the future and change them. Similarly, the future, in its own way, can also influence the present. That is "The WAY of HOPE".

This is what Peter means when he writes about a great gain for these Christians in their suffering, and about knowing the joy of their salvation NOW! :-

"You greatly rejoice in your salvation even though now, for a little while (perspective) you may have to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith – of greater worth than gold, may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed. Though you have not seen him you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy,…WHY?...because you are receiving (in the present) the goal of your faith (future) the salvation of your souls.

Paul Utley is full of little ditties & corny jokes – seemingly one for every occasion! Here’s a “Paul ditty” fitting for this sermon:

Look outside and be depressed
Look inside and be distressed
Look at Christ and be at rest

In the last message I preached here, I mentioned that the Israelites were led out of Egypt to worship God – Moses’ repeated demand of Pharaoh was: “Let my people go that they might worship me”. Together, with all the followers of Jesus, we come to church to celebrate “Our Living Hope” – to reach out and bring the future into the present, so that we can be what we hope for, so that we will live our hope & “Embrace our world with the heart of God”. For His name’s sake. AMEN.