

WELCOME 13 May 2018 – 7 Easter '18 B

1 John 5:1-21

Good morning! and welcome to our on-going Easter celebrations! Never forget...Easter is not just a day...not only a season...Easter is a way of life! We as a church make that life visible as the church...And it is great to have you all here this morning. Please stay with us for morning tea so we can all get a chance to know one another better.

A new budget is presented. A nation pulls out of a treaty because "it's a bad deal." An athlete signs a contract with a new club. What do they all have in common? They are all based on the premise that "you've got to give something to get something" They are all about doing one thing to get another thing in return. Quid pro quo. One hand washes the other. Scratch my back...

Some folks think that's how God works. If I keep out of trouble, God will reward me. If I do X & don't do Y God will surely smile at the end of my life & take me to heaven, whatever that is. It's the misunderstanding that Christianity is a set of rules to be followed, requirements to be fulfilled, 'how to's' that must be lived to get an easier road here on earth & whatever it is good people get when this life is over...whatever it takes to keep God happy...

But Jesus said the key to life is a relationship: *"This is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, & Jesus Christ whom you have sent."* John, one of Jesus' closest friends echoes that *"This is what God has testified: He has given us eternal life, & this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life."* Life at its fullest (now & forever) is living in the awareness that we are freely brought by God into a living & personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

When we have that relationship, it changes everything because we have already been given all things - eternal love, abundant life, overwhelming victory. Living in that relationship leads to a visible faith because once you have it all, all that remains is to pass it on - give it away!

And we'll explore & experience that together today... LWKids is on holidays but it will be back soon...slightly new format...should be exciting!

Let's pray...

Lord of Lords, light up our lives today until we radiate with your ever-present love & power. Release your glory in us so we can live into the hope to which you have called us. Through you Lord Jesus we pray ... Amen!

Jesus does not give recipes that show the way to God as other teachers of religion do. He is himself the way.

-- Karl Barth – Swiss Reformed theologian

7 EASTER '18 B – VISIBLE CHURCH: VISIBLE FAITH – 1 JOHN 5:1-21

FAITH CHAT:

1. Do you have a favourite Bible story? Why that one?
2. Someone hears you use the word "gospel" & asks "What exactly is 'the gospel'?" You say...

That last question is critical... & I'll raise it up again from time to time because we need to be able to "give the reason for the hope we have within us" as 1 Pt 3:15 says; but also because I think in the 21st century... even folks w/ a passing acquaintance w/ Christian faith don't know it was either Martin Luther or Karl Barth (Swiss reformed theologian) who said, "All pastors should preach with one eye on the Scriptures & the other on current events" So that the preaching of the gospel would point to areas of our public lives so it can speak loudly. So...you get out your BIBLES & I'll grab a quick current event

I have to thank Philippa for her current events eye this week... She pointed me to an op-ed article in the Weekend Australian by Bernard Salt. author/columnist w/ The Australian & Herald Sun. He's writing about something completely different... but he begins with a discussion of original sin... "In Catholicism & some other faiths, a central tenet is the concept of original sin. I'm sure there are theologians who will correct my interpretation, but the logic can be loosely summarised as follows: because Adam defied God in the Garden of Eden, all of humanity is born into a state of original sin that must be atoned for by leading a good & perhaps holy life, & by acts of contrition."

You hear that? Mr Salt operates with that *quid pro quo* misunderstanding of being a Christian. He genuinely believes that if I do X & don't do Y God will surely smile at the end of my life & take me to heaven, whatever that is. Acc to him, I have to make up for – fix - atone for the brokenness/sin/rebellion against God inherent in my soul that has existed since Adam *AND* Eve chose to live like they knew better than God - as God for themselves. I am born into that sin rebellion brokenness selfishness God-for-my-selfishness & according to his worldview it's on me to make that right.

We have got to allow the Holy Spirit to perfect in us our capacity & courage in hearing that misunderstanding of the gospel & saying "No... the good news is that God himself has come to us in Jesus Christ, to rescue & remake all creation in love & joy by the life, death & resurrection of Jesus on our behalf." We are made new & whole & restored to the fullness of life love joy & peace that God intends not because your heart is good/pure/holy but because the heart of Christ pulses with a love for you that will never end. Not because your deeds are righteous but because Christ has been righteous on your behalf & clothes you with his righteousness. Not because you have lived for Jesus but because he has lived/died/risen for you. Not because you asked him to be your Saviour but because while you were yet a sinner, Christ died for you, chose you, called you, & washed you clean in his own holy & divine blood. And don't you ever forget it.

John began his letter like this: *We proclaim to you the one who existed from the beginning, whom we have heard & seen. We saw him with our own eyes & touched him with our own hands. He is the Word of life... And now we testify & proclaim to you that he is the one who is eternal life... We proclaim to you what we ourselves have actually seen & heard so that you may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father & with his Son, Jesus Christ. We are writing these things so that you may fully share our joy*

Now he finishes with this: *"This is what God has testified: He has given us eternal life, & this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life."* Life at its fullest (now & forever) is living in the awareness that we are freely brought by God into a living & personal relationship with Jesus Christ. *I have written this to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know you have eternal life.*

The community that received this letter knew Jesus. They trusted Jesus was the Son of God. They struggled with sin, & false teachings, & divisions, & all of the things so many of us in church communities find ourselves dealing with, some days they were just scared... scared they'd believe the wrong thing... scared they would do something horrendous & God would throw them overboard... scared they would sin just a little too much, & would find themselves removed from God's love... scared they would give in to the society that hated them & marginalized them... & simply become indistinguishable from the rest of the mess in their world. But everything John wrote in this letter was written because he wanted them to know that God never fails to keep God's promises.

Even when human leaders get it bassackward, even when sin lingers, even when frustrations run high & death never takes a holiday... God is faithful. For this community that believed in the name of Jesus, they could rest assured that they would receive eternal life – not because of their perfection, but because of God's faithfulness & grace. And isn't that amazing news for us, too? The good news of Jesus isn't something we can lose. It isn't something we can have snatched out from under us. The grace of God is something given freely, & it's the one thing in this life we can rest assured we will never, ever lose.

"When push comes to shove" – "when your back's against the wall" – "hanging on by a thread" - What do you know for certain? What are you willing to bet your life on? In a world where it's easy to get confused, tangled up, caught up or

run over...Because the end of our world is always closer than we think...because the end of me is always nearer than it was yesterday...What does your life count for? When you are no longer here what difference will you have made? In the face of life's most powerful questions, we dare not lose sight of the truth that real life always was is & will be about a relationship with God —a relationship/a life that we have right now through Jesus Christ. He has set His love on us & desires above all things intimacy with us.

This is what God has testified: He has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have God's Son does not have life. It's this life – the life we have by grace in the Son of God who loved us & gave his life for us – that God seeks to weave throughout our whole lives...that God wants to make visible in our words & deeds & infuse into our hopes & dreams...

A week or so ago...I shared that while I was in uni I ran with a pretty vigorous evangelical Christian crowd. I was still trying to get a handle on my faith & I was pretty adrift at times...but these folks were on fire...It was common for them to ask a near-perfect stranger "If you died tonight would you go to heaven?" We were into the most intense evangelism methods of the day. Bill Bright's 4 Spiritual Laws & Evangelism Explosion...fairly confrontational ways to get a conversation started about Jesus...

Now like I said...that's not a bad question...No one is guaranteed their next breath & reminding ourselves that our duration on this earth is limited & uncertain is legit, but the odds are in your favour that you will in fact get out of bed tomorrow. So I've always wondered if the better question isn't something like: "When you get out of bed tomorrow, why?" Toward what end for what purpose aiming your life toward what?

Jesus sees YOU: bathed in his forgiveness, washed in his blood, clothed in his love & grace...becoming like him radiating his presence/power/passion to the people around you with peace beyond understanding & overflowing joy. His death/rez make that vision a reality...we don't have to do anything to be that person...by his death/rez we already are...BUT Jesus also wants to see you & me contagious with his love – infectious with his passion to bring home all the lost & straying – pulling in those who like me as a teen/twenty-ish disciple who are pretty adrift at times trying to sort out this maze of life. He has this otherworldly expectation that we will be overflowing with his joy as he works his saving will to completion in & through our lives & into the hearts & lives of those around us.

Nick Vujcic is a man of Serbian-Australian heritage. Christian Motivational speaker who now lives with his wife & kids near where we lived in NTx. actually has 4 kids now Nick is a rare man...1 of maybe 7 people alive now born with tetra-amelia syndrome which means he was born w/o arms/legs. I'll let him speak for himself...

"When God doesn't change a circumstance, we know that He can use it for good, that others may see the power of Christ in us...And this is the purpose that we are called to live for: to be a living testimony to those around us that they can see the victory that we can live in by the power of His Holy Spirit. And maybe these challenges that are present in my life are not just for me to be more dependent on God but to be an example & a visual aid of God's strength & victory in my weakness...My future is not held hostage by my circumstance. The act of living out God's purpose & plan & seeing how it impacts others in such dramatic & life-changing way, there is no better life for me or for anyone else who will live their life for Jesus Christ." – Nick Vujcic

My future is not held hostage by my circumstance. The act of living out God's purpose & plan & seeing how it impacts others in such dramatic & life-changing way, there is no better life for me or for anyone else who will live their life for Jesus Christ...When you forgive, when you open your heart, home, or fridge to someone else, when you hold accountable, when you listen in love, when you refuse to simply go along to get along, when you decide to be more generous than you think is reasonable, when you speak the good news aloud to someone else & when you live sacrificially for someone beyond the 4-walls of your own home...there is no better life for me or for anyone else who will live their life for Jesus Christ.

"This is what God has testified: He has given us eternal life, & this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life." Life at its fullest (now & forever) is living in the awareness that we are freely brought by God into a living & personal relationship with Jesus Christ. When we have that relationship, it changes everything because we have already been given all things - eternal love, abundant life, overwhelming victory, answered prayers, hope this world cannot steal, joy no circumstance can darken, peace no one else can comprehend. Living in that relationship leads to a visible faith because once you have it all, all that remains is to pass it on - give it away!

Let's pray for that...for ourselves but also for those who will receive the gospel from us this week... *Lord Jesus, light up our lives today until we radiate with your ever-present love & power. Release your glory in us so we can live into the hope to which you have called us. Give us boldness and wisdom to speak your good news at every opportunity with the immense love in which you gave yourself for us . Through you Lord Jesus we pray...Amen!*