

WELCOME 19th April 2020 – 2 Easter '20 A

John 20:1-9 & 1 Peter 1:1-9

Good morning! Welcome back to the On-line well of Living Water as our Easter season celebration continues! I'm glad you're here & hope this becomes a place you feel ok & a part of all that's going on. But even more I hope sooner rather than later we're all together in the same place again! Today is *NOT YET* that day!

But *TODAY IS* the day the Lord has made & we're going to rejoice & be glad in it!

Let's think about this...

Two heads are better than one. There's no "I" in "team" There's strength in numbers.

Great motivational slogans...but the truth is they point us to what many of us are missing in these days of isolation & distancing...each other...

When the church is told it is "non-essential"...when we are pushed farther to the margins of society...when our freedom to worship is curtailed...often beyond reason...when it's tempting to simply withdraw from the public square & leave the world to its own devices...Peter, the bold brash big fisherman speaks with great wisdom calling us to remember we are firmly planted in Christ not as isolated individuals but as a community...a people...a gathered body that together lives in the assurance of Christ's resurrection & into the hope only the living Jesus can give.

We'll explore & experience that today...as we **Move Together** in a living **hope** that we can share with the world, even if we're forced to stand at a distance from each other for a time...

Let's pray...and then we'll get stuck into it.

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Lord Jesus, We dare to believe in the things we can't see: In your love for us - In your love for those around us - In the hope of eternity. We dare to believe that another world is possible & that suffering can end & that we can play a role in the kingdom to come. We dare to believe in heaven on earth & in the light that scatters darkness & in your justice made complete. Jesus through you we believe all things will be made new...in you we pray to believe that all things are possible also in us. Amen

2 EASTER '20 A – MOVE TOGETHER: IN HOPE

FAITH CHAT:

1. How are you keeping yourself occupied during this season of isolation?
2. How do you as a follower of Jesus experience & express hope?

Viktor Frankl was an Austrian Psychiatrist who survived WWII being shuffled between 4 different Nazi Concentration camps...incl Auschwitz & Theresienstadt. After the war ended, he used his experiences in the camps to further his psychiatric work & wrote his most well-known book, *Man's Search for Meaning*. His understanding was that humans flourish only when we move into the future in pursuit of some goal ...something meaningful...something waiting for us to reach...He watched his fellow prisoners & saw some rise above the circumstances in the camps & survive, while others fell apart & died often quite rapidly/suddenly/unexplainedly.

About those 2 completely different outcomes he wrote: "The prisoner who had lost his faith in the future — *HIS* future — was doomed. With his loss of belief in the future, he also lost his spiritual health & hold; he let himself decline & became subject to mental & physical decay...He simply gave up."

What Frankl observed was the life-giving power of hope...We don't survive in this world & we certainly don't thrive in this world w/o hope. The problem most of us face is that we don't know what hope is or we live with an understanding of hope that is in no way a true definition...so we go through life forever disappointed & frustrated & disheartened & groping from one false hope to the next...What do I mean?

Well this morning when I welcomed you to our on-line well...our few minutes together here I said: I'm glad you're here & *hope* this becomes a place you feel ok & a part of all that's going on. But even more I *hope* sooner rather than later we're all together in the same place again!

I used the word *hope* in the same sense that we might say, "I hope it doesn't rain the day of the wedding." or "I hope the internet holds up for us today" or "I hope I can get to the US this year for my mother's 90th birthday" In reality **MIS-USING** it (like we often do) as a synonym for optimism...wishing...wanting...as if hope is equal parts wishful thinking longing for the unlikely & extreme naiveté. Not 1 of those 5 "hopes" is founded in any sort of reality...they are each as likely to NOT happen as to happen.

But Biblical hope is completely different...Biblical hope is a not some pipe dream wish-upon-a-star punt on some desired outcome...**Biblical hope is a future certainty grounded in a present reality...a future CERTAINTY grounded in a present REALITY.**

How does that work? vs 3 "*All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is by his great mercy that we have been born again into a living hope because God raised Jesus Christ from the dead...*"

Present reality: God raised Jesus Christ from the dead. Peter writes 30-or so yrs after the rez/1st Easter & his witness to that fact/reality never altered. Present reality: Peter had seen his best beloved friend & teacher slaughtered right before his eyes **AND** had seen him risen from the dead. Present reality: Jesus had given his friends advanced warning that he would be betrayed, tortured, murdered, buried & raised to life again according to the plan/purpose & by the power of the Father **AND** it happened just as he said. Present reality: In the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead all the promises of God find their fulfilment. From the beginning God promised to renew the entire creation freeing it from bondage to sin/death/evil one - releasing it from its frustration/burden/brokenness allowing it to flourish abundantly.

Peter points to that present reality: *by his great mercy we have been born again into a living hope because God raised Jesus Christ from the dead...* Peter declares with absolute certainty...In Jesus, God comes personally to us, to rescue & renew all things by Christ's life, death & resurrection...**THAT MOMENT** is now!

But Peter also wants us to know a 2nd reality...imbedded w/in the 1st. vs 2 *God the Father knew you & chose you long ago, & his Spirit has made you holy...& (you) have been cleansed by the blood of Jesus Christ.* Look...I don't know how you see yourself...some of you I've likely never met...you just clicked in this morning & I'm thankful you're here...but I know it's easy to feel pretty alone/adrift in this world...to hear over/over again you're not good enough – never measure up – misfit - loser - abandoned – forgotten – unwanted...

Not...One...Word of that is true! *God the Father knew you & chose you long ago...* ^{b/4} you were a flicker of life on this earth, you were a flame of love in the Father's heart...^{b/4} the 1st star exploded into space @ God's command, you were known/loved/chosen by God & set apart for His purpose...to bear his image, live his presence & carry out his purposes in this world. *Even before he made the world, God loved us & chose us in Christ to be holy & w/o fault in his eyes. Eph 1:4*

Present reality: *God the Father knew you & chose you long ago, & his Spirit has made you holy...and (you) have been cleansed by the blood of Jesus Christ.* For reasons known only in the depth of God's love...the Father, in eternity past chose you to be His child; chose you to be the recipient of His saving grace. Through no merit of your own, through no deserving of your own, God chose you! Present reality: Jesus gave his life - shed his blood - rose from the grave so the Father could adopt & embrace you as his own beloved child. Right this minute ***THAT*** is your present reality – ***THAT*** is where you find 'living hope.'

Too often we look at our present circumstances & see anything but hope...anything but the promises of God fulfilled or the presence/power of God at work/life abundant. I'm not blind to lockdowns & job losses & financial ruin so many of us face. Every wage earner knows...these are scary days. But if COVID-19 disappeared tomorrow... the next day would bring something else...Life gets hard. Troubles weigh us down. Tragedies, injuries, fights, the strains of life, difficulties of work, breakdown in our relationships — it can all chip away at us. Sometimes it's just one shot & we're flat out...loved one dies, an accident, something happens that just doesn't seem fair. We start to wonder if we woke up in the wrong world because we're foreigners strangers exiles in this one.

That is precisely the situation of the people who first read Peter's letter. He writes a letter to encourage followers of Jesus who've been chased to the 4 winds by Roman persecution...it will be carried across an area about the size of NSW... 800Kk (what we know as Turkey & beyond) living under threat of Roman swords, crosses, gladiator games & colosseum contests

But the present reality: Christ raised from the dead...you known/loved/chosen by the Father - set apart for his purposes – washed clean by Christ's shed blood produces 3 assurances – 3 anchors that hold us in any storm/strife/struggle: vs 4
Now we have a priceless inheritance—an inheritance that is kept in heaven for you, pure & undefiled, beyond the reach of change & decay. (imperishable, undefiled & unfading) Look around you...right now...Look! Everything you see & everything you can't see but know is yours...sooner or later wears out, breaks down, dies or goes away. All of our earthly attachments end except those connected to Jesus by his death/rez & our trust in his promises. Everything can & will be lost from this world...Nothing of this world is imperishable/undefiled/unfading...Nothing. Dust it all is & to dust it shall all return.

That's not intended to scare you & frighten you into somehow trusting Jesus to escape that eventual loss of all things... It is the fact of life in this world...Whatever happens in this world of real pain real struggle & all too real loss; there is a greater present reality: God raised Jesus from the dead & "*Now we have a priceless inheritance – an inheritance that is kept in heaven for you, pure & undefiled, beyond the reach of change & decay.*" Right in the midst of the worst we can imagine or this world can dream up we are called to cling to that one thing that is imperishable, undefiled & unfading: Jesus Christ Risen from the dead...ruling over all things in love & holding us in an embrace that cannot be shaken loose.

That present reality...Jesus raised by the power of God from the dead...grants us that future certainty...an inheritance imperishable, undefiled & unfading...& washes back on us in living hope...*LIVING HOPE* Not only hope beyond this life but hope *IN* this life. vs 6 "*So be truly glad There is wonderful joy ahead, even though you have to endure many trials for a little while.*" Do you see...joy is not only coming down the track but it is available now, 1st our many trials here in this life are only for a little while. Pain. heartache, suffering, tears, struggle are not eternal...those don't last just like my bank acct won't last just like fame doesn't last...just like everything else in this world...the present reality which grants us the future certainty wipes away all those things & leaves nothing but joy in the presence of God in the radiance of his glory & the pleasure of living with him forever.

Joy is not only coming down the track but it is available now, 1st because our many trials here in this life are only for a little while, but 2nd because right here/right now "...through your faith, God is protecting you by his power until you receive this salvation..." Maybe today you don't feel too protected...you're in one of those vulnerable at-risk categories & you're afraid to leave your lounge room...but at this point we have to see with more than our eyes...at best our eyes will show us only how near/clear/present the current crop of dangers are. Our eyes will only show us what we already know... drought/fire/flood/age-weariness/financial turmoil/illness/death/virus/fear.

Peter says we have to see through our faith that God has planted in our hearts because it's here that he has taken up residence. It's here that he seeks to do his transforming work. It's from here that he moves through us to bring hope to a world that is both troubled & troubling. Hope is a future certainty grounded in a present reality. That present reality is that by his resurrection life in Jesus triumphs over all that would tear you down devour or destroy you...In that victory, hope is God's gift that is intended to be our way of life. In the middle of whatever this life brings in all its violent virulent fervor; the response from God's people is not hide...but hallelujah. vs 8

*You love him even though you have never seen him.
Though you do not see him now, you trust him; & you rejoice with a glorious, inexpressible joy.*

Our hope, our future **CERTAINTY** grounded in a present **REALITY**...in this world increasingly driven by distrust & fear, is being committed to the fundamental truth that God will have the last word about me/you/the world & that word is a word of grace & abundance & joy & love & life...our destiny is not more violence & discord – not chaos & distress – not alienation & agony... Jesus' resurrection gives us the assurance/certainty that he will by his life & death & death-destroying resurrection bring light out of darkness, growth out of decay, life from the jaws of death & love from the very emptiness of human fear. That's his gift to you today...and Peter, calls us to remember we are firmly planted in Christ not as isolated individuals but as a community...a people...a body that together lives in the assurance of Christ's resurrection & into the hope only the living Jesus can give.

Let's pray with that in mind...

Lord Jesus let our hope in you grow in all that we are & in all that we do. Make every word & deed an expression of your life & love given to us. In this season of separation draw us closer to you & then nearer to those around us so your presence may be shared & your joy multiplied so that your power makes all things new. In your name we pray... Amen