

**First Sunday in Advent:
“Hope”
Romans 8:22 – 25**

Romans 8 verse 22 to 25:

“Against its will, all creation was subjected to God’s curse.
But with eager hope, the creation looks forward to the day when it will join
God’s children in glorious freedom from death and decay.
We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of
childbirth right up to the present time.
Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan
inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption, the redemption of our
bodies.
For in this hope we were saved.
But hope that is seen is no hope at all.
Who hopes for what they already have?
But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.”

As I said last week, I have a sense that people are tired and not just a physical
weariness, but weariness of the soul.
It’s a weariness that only the Holy Spirit can reach.
And I extended an invitation – and the invitation still stands – to have prayer
I hope that that would be a norm in our church.

With in mind I also don’t intend to speak for long.

So this morning, as you would know, we are in the first Sunday of Advent.
Hope begins the season.
Hope looks forward in anticipation.

I have to ask,

“What is the Hope of Advent?”

What are we, what are you, looking forward to?
What are we anticipating?

How would you answer that?
Tell the person next to you.

Well, we anticipate our Saviour's arrival.
God in Person, God with us, God who Jesus Christ our Lord.
That in itself is amazing.
Jesus who is the most good and beautiful has come to be with you and me.
That in itself is enough.

Yet with the hope of Advent there is more.
The hope of Advent is that because God in Jesus has come into world, the world
and your world can be different.

So in these verses, there is a huge, grand cosmic vision.
It's cosmic in the sense that it's vast and all encompassing.

Creation, the created world, is waiting to be set free from death and decay.

Like a golden thread woven through the Old Testament is the hope of a coming
Anointed One, this Jesus the Messiah, who would put the world to rights.

That things, that the world, would be different;
That sin would be forgiven, that Satan would not ruin,
That oppressors and oppression would be overthrown,
That there would be peace on earth to those on whom His favour rests;
"The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat..."
That nothing would harm or destroy anymore.
That sickness and death would come to an end,
That pandemics will no longer paralyse the planet,
That lockdowns will be no more,
That God would rule with righteousness and justice and faithfulness.

Sounds very much like the hope and longings of our world today I think.

We see glimpses of this hope.
All throughout history we see those who know and love Jesus working in ways that
give us a foretaste of what is to come.

I mean, as I've said before, hospitals and hospices are a Christian invention.

William Wilberforce who worked tirelessly for the abolition of slavery in England.
Who here has heard of the Rev. Arthur Broome? Broome was a colleague of
Wilberforce's who worked to establish what we know today as the RSPCA – the
Royal Society for the Protection of Animals.

Consider this:

- In the last 20 years, the proportion of the world population living in extreme poverty has halved.
- Today people have a 75% less chance of being killed by a natural disaster than their grand-parents or great grand-parents.
- A majority of the world population, 85.3 percent, had some access to the electricity grid in their countries.
- The numbers of animals like wild Tigers, Mountain Gorillas and Californian Condors are on the rise. The numbers are still not great but they are the best in decades.

We see glimpses of the great hope that is to come and yet to be honest there some problems that we cannot solve.

I mean, we cannot bring about the kingdom of God in its fullness; only King Jesus can do that.

We look forward to that day in hope when the King will come to set all creation free.

So there is this great, cosmic hope and we get caught up in and are a part of.

In fact God in his love He has made us central to it.

He loves this planet and he loves the environment. I mean He made it.

Yet he loves people most of all.

He loves you as an individual and as a person.

And what's the hope for individuals and persons we read about here?

The redemption of our what???

The redemption of our... bodies which is a reference to our own physical bodily resurrections.

You want to know the stats?

Your skin replaces itself every month, the stomach lining, every five days, the liver, every six weeks, the skeleton, every 3 months, your cheek cells, 3 times a day,

98% of the atoms in your body are replaced every year. Our bodies are

both old and new at the same time.

But then, later in life, something happens.

After the age of 65 or thereabouts advanced aging sets in.

1% of people under the age of 45 are afflicted with chronic diseases, but that increases to 5% of people between the age of 45 and 64, but after the age of 65, 86 people out of every 100 are afflicted with one or more chronic diseases.

(Now they are American figures, but I would hazard a guess, that NZ figures might not be that dissimilar).

Are you feeling encouraged this morning? ☺

Our hope for ourselves is redeemed, reconditioned, renovated bodies.

What other r-words? Remodelled, repaired?

And one more 'r' to add to that – reunion – the hope for those who we've lost.

Some years ago a couple told their story about their struggles with their daughter.

Their daughter had been very difficult, especially as a teenager.

And not normal teenage angst but rebelling against everything they believed and tried to teach her.

She became part of an alternative culture – Mohawk, black clothes, depressing angry music – that kind of stuff.

Worse than that – what cut her parents to the heart – was her behavior towards them was just awful.

She treated their Christian faith and lifestyle with absolute contempt and became belligerent and hostile as a person.

So she left home.

Her parents prayed and prayed for her salvation, until one day they received some devastating news: as their daughter attempted to cross a highway she was hit and killed by a tractor.

As you can imagine, as parents were absolutely devastated. The father and mother buried their daughter, convinced their prayers had been in vain.

Then, two days later after the funeral a letter arrived, written by their daughter. Somehow their daughter had ended up studying at a Christian college and part of being at the college meant having to attend chapel every week. On one particular day the speaker articulated a very specific

evangelistic message and when an invitation was given, she received Jesus as her King and Forgiver.

After chapel she went straight back to her dormitory and wrote a loving letter to her parents, begging for forgiveness for all the hurt she had inflicted on them, and promising that, because Jesus was now in her life, things were going to be different.

The following weekend she promised to come home, just so they could be together and have a face-to-face reconciliation. It was a well written and beautiful letter, and she mailed it the same day.

The next day she was killed.

Although their hearts were seared with grief they had comfort and hope; the hope that one day, because of Jesus, they would see her again, face-to-face.

St Paul's, the Church (with a capital 'C') goes through seasons where we are reminded of areas of faith that we've forgotten.

We've been in a season where we have rightly emphasised the need for activism and the need to care for those material need, and that never goes away.

I think we're in a new season.

So if someone is standing on edge of their eternity, one of the cruellest things you could do is bang on about the All Blacks or United States politics or climate change or social justice or Black Lives Matters or White Privilege or whatever else.

In my role as a pastor I've sat and prayer with sick and dying people. And it the time what matters is that moment and what comes next.

In other words, we have a hope that transcends this world and we shouldn't be ashamed of talking about it.

Paul actually says in this hope we are saved.

So we have the hope of transformed planet and our own future transformation.

There one other I want to touch on this morning – ***the hope of life change***.

Our world it seems yearns for hope; yearns for things to be different.

But when you talk to most ordinary everyday people, what they yearn for is that things were different in their own lives.

I mean, most people are aware that they have stuff in their lives. They're aware of their character flaws, their besetting sins and their ingrained habits.

And sometimes I talk to people or I hear from people in their honest moments they look at lives or they look inside themselves and they say, "*I just wish I was different; I wish I could be better.*"

It's a deep desire for life change.

You see the hope that Jesus coming gives us is the hope of changed life and it's actually in this passage.

We're told we have "the first fruits of the Spirit".

In other words we have a new life in us and who wants to bring about the good to replace the bad.

You know St Paul's I've said this before: I'm troubled when I meet someone and they're a grumpy Christian. If they can find something to complain about, they will. Then I meet them 10 years later and they're still a grumpy Christian. Then I meet them again another 10 years later and they're *an even grumpier Christian*.

And my response is, what's going on here???

Where I'm up to is this: we have to cooperate with the Holy Spirit.

We have the Holy Spirit inside of us, who, *if allowed*, begins to transform our lives.

It's like the Holy Spirit, who is the Lord, respects our personal agency and waits to be invited.

We can be different.

We can become beautiful people – I mean, you are already but you become beautifuller people. (I don't know if that's a word but it is now).

You know, one of the ways we co-operate with the Spirit is what we did last week – we respond to the invitation for prayer.

I don't think last week should be a one off.

So this morning, if that's you – you've wrestled and battled with life change – come forward for prayer.