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Sermon

Jesus gives us Hope

John 20:19-31

Easter 19th April, 2020

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Good morning family, welcome to our home. I hope that you all are managing ok in your bubble, through this lock down situation.

The world certainly has been thrown a curve ball with this virus, but I like to look at what positive gains can we all take from the situation.

The most obvious change that has occurred, is communication. We all now are more aware for instance, of our neighbours and neighbourhood.

Those of us who have more than one person living together, have had this amazing opportunity to be together and enjoy activities that we couldn't find the time for previously, but golly, I miss seeing my children and grandees.

It is extremely sad to see so many people succumb to the virus, but I am so pleased to see the numbers dropping and now we look forward to moving to level 3, then 2 then hopefully back to some form of normality resulting with positive changes in our way of life that has been sorely needed.

For most teachers in schools around New Zealand, there no doubt has been nervousness and even a level of fear, at being involved in something new, something that they were not trained to do at Training College, that is, to teach remotely, to teach on Zoom from their homes.

The School holiday period is what many see as a wind down time, time to relax from the stress and strain of teaching etc. but as I am married to a School Principal, I can assure you, that this particular School holiday period was anything but a wind down, and as you can imagine, it's a massive task for schools that is made much more difficult by the limited time frame of setting up all the ins and outs of teaching online.

The same will be going for those who are hopefully about to return to their workplace, to an unknown future, what will it look like? Uncertainty, apprehension, and anxiety.

This Corona Virus has instantly changed the world and the way we live and interact with each other, and has made us all put our futures, our holiday dreams, trips abroad to see family etc., all our plans etc. are now all on hold. How are we, in our locked down rooms, in our bubbles, how are we going to get on, will we ever get back to life as we knew it? what do we do next?

Today is known as low Sunday, it's the week after Easter, and like most of the people of New Zealand, we have been cooped up for four weeks and do not know how much longer this is

going on. And if you are not working, if you are retired, you also must be feeling the effects of not seeing family particularly those precious grandchildren. In my life, I have never seen anything like this and when will it end?

And it's so sad when I hear people on talkback saying things like, "I just don't know how I can get through another week, or another day." The Lock down is really getting to people, they need hope.

That then takes into today's Gospel story, and makes us think, what were the disciples feeling like after Jesus was crucified? I think they must have been feeling far, far worse, than we are feeling today with our lockdown. How were they going to get through the next few days, let alone months or even years? They must have felt that they had completely given up, and that they had lost everything by following Jesus, the New Messiah. Their world, as they knew it, was being radically changed by Jesus and their belief system was being completely turned upside down, which was in direct opposition to their Jewish roots, and whose leaders were now out to destroy them.

They also had been leading a life of not knowing what to expect next while they were supporting Jesus with the difficult crowds who were also being introduced to this new Christian religion, and with their many questions that must have been asked, and then, to top it all off, their master, Jesus, is suddenly and shamefully crucified on a cross for a crime that he did not even commit.

These Disciples were going through much more uncertainty, and unknown future, than anything we are going through, those disciples were devastated, they were scared out their wits, and that is why we find them in that locked room, in a lock down, not knowing what to do next. When Jesus was crucified, everything fell apart, and to the disciples, it wasn't supposed to be that way, because they had given up everything to follow him, and definitely not to watch him being crucified for something that he didn't do. They were devastated, and now they were lost. And it was just when they thought that it couldn't get any worse, Jesus miraculously appeared to them in that room, in their lock down, and changed their lives forever.

All hope had been restored, because Jesus had conquered death. They must have been so excited and probably jumped and danced around the room in joy. They were suddenly empowered, all hope had been restored and even more, the future became so appealing. They were now ready to take on the might of the Jewish leaders, the Roman Empire and even entire world, and they just could not wait to get started.

So, what happened? What changed them? How did Jesus restore their faith, when only a moment ago, all was lost? To me the answer is simple, Jesus proved to them that there is life after death, that he was living proof, coming back from the dead in that way, and that all his teaching was sound, everything that he had taught them was true, and he was now beside them to continuing that journey.

In our reading this morning, it details that moment where everything seemed to make sense, and it all started by Jesus getting their attention, in the same way he gets our attention, by humbling us, making us feel inadequate, in a way that we are not relying on our own resources, but relying on him; fully appreciating the grace that he is about to pour out on us.

The next thing that Jesus does is to meet us exactly where we are. The disciples were scared to death, hiding in a room with the doors locked, doubting everything they had been taught, when suddenly Jesus appears to them and greets them, probably with a smile. Jesus met them in the place where they were at, but notice they didn't recognise him at first, possibly because they were not looking for him, so it is so important, then that when we are in those dark places, we need to start looking for him, to recognise him and allow him to guide us free.

When Jesus showed the disciples the holes in his hand and feet, he was not only identifying Himself as Jesus, no, he was showing them how much he loved them, he was showing them the pain he endured, not just for them, not just for the whole world back then, but for the whole world, for us in this present day and for those in the future.

We all live in an imperfect world, a world full of sin, and we are all guilty of sin, we fail so many times, and in doing so we feel guilty, and that feeling of guilt can lead to condemnation, condemnation of ourselves, and sometimes of those around us. Jesus offers us forgiveness and forgiveness is the key to happiness.

Psalm 32:1 "Blessed is the person whose sins are forgiven and whose wrongs are pardoned. Happy is the person whom the Lord does not consider guilty anymore"

Because of the cross and the resurrection, we have been completely forgiven, and if we are forgiven by God, he then wants us to be so empowered, that we can share and extend that forgiveness to others.

In verse 22, Jesus said [in effect] "I don't want to just be with you, I want to be in you." Then Jesus breathed on them and He said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit".

This simply means that the Holy Spirit, God's power and presence, is deep within us, deep within our lives. When the Spirit came, the disciples realized they were no longer alone in this world, that God was with them, and in them, so that when they were troubled they could look deep within themselves for that comfort from Jesus that He is with them, and he is with us and that is what keeps us going.

As Christians, we believe that it in our darkest hours, Jesus is really with us, all the time and that is why we are here this morning, to worship him, because he is alive within us regardless of what we are going through in this lock down. And this sense of peace cannot be explained in any other way. It takes away the loneliness, the doubt, the hurt, and restores hope for the future. The scriptures give us this hope in *1 John 14:13* "we are in him, and that he is in us".

And finally, if we have that peace within our hearts, this then, will give us hope, hope for the future, because all of us need something greater than ourselves, to push us beyond ourselves, beyond lives hindered by our own thoughts and limitations, to lives that will be enhanced by discovering that peace and that understanding of what he wants us to do.

God's plan for our lives is far greater than any plan that we could ever think of for ourselves. What those plans are for our lives, are very rarely, if ever understood by us, but they are understood by him, as **he** is the one leading us on to **his** purposes, and **his** glory, and I suppose ultimately it is to our glory as well.

So that is what Jesus did with those disciples that day. They started off being devastated, guilt-ridden, fearful and lost, they were defeated before they even started. Then Jesus appeared to them and said, "as the Father sent Me, I now send you." In that moment, he recharged their batteries, lifted their spirits and empowered their very existence. They were now equipped to take on the world and transform it, and that is what they did.

This little group of uneducated simple men went out and spread the Gospel all over the Middle East and within 300 years it overtook the mighty Roman Empire, and today, Christianity, in its various forms, has a following of 2.5 billion people. And I think this is quite poignant, because looking back, we see a world transformed by those fearful disciples.

It therefore it does not matter how bad things have become for us with this lockdown, with this Covid-19 virus, with this uncertainty, because of Jesus, because of the cross, there is always hope, hope to change our circumstances, hope to change our lives, and hope to change the world, and that hope comes from Jesus as, "*we are in him, and that he is in us*"

Amen.