

Reflection for Easter 2 by Rev'd Canon Michael Last

Embedded within the Easter season is not only the narrative and meaning of Jesus' resurrection - his victory over sin and death, which lies at the heart of our faith - but also the idea of hope; hope that springs from the resurrection; hope of what will and can be.

When we speak of the Christian hope what do we mean and how should it influence the way we live our lives?

In today's gospel Thomas or, as he often referred to, "Doubting Thomas" wants hope based very firmly on evidence and reality. He wants to be a 100% sure, he wants certainty rather than hope. *"Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it."*

Pick up a dictionary and look up the word "hope" and you find something like this *"to look with expectation and desire"*, whereas a biblical or theological dictionary takes it a stage further: *"Hope, it would seem, is a psychological necessity, if humanity is to envisage the future at all. Even if there are no rational grounds for it, humanity still continues to hope."*

One example of this can be seen every year around this time. It is the way that for so many football clubs at the wrong end of their respective league, the player, coaches, and fans will hold onto hope - hope that they will not be relegated - until it becomes mathematically impossible for them to escape! Regardless of how badly they may be playing or how many matches they are losing they still hang on to that irrational hope. While there is hope there can also be dreams, nerve racking as that may be.

That is one kind of hope; the Easter hope, though, is different.

The Easter hope, the Christian hope, is not based on something which has no rational grounding, not something covered in ifs or if-onlies; rather it is a hope based on the certainty of the resurrection of our Lord. It is a certainty that those early disciples discovered, many of them, like Thomas - skeptical at first, not daring to hope. But as Jesus reached out and touched them, as they encountered him as he opened for them the scriptures, a new reality dawned. We are reminded by St Paul in one of his letters that without that certainty, we are nothing but fools to be following Christ. Everything that we hope for is based on little more than illusion if the resurrection is not a reality.

The first thing we can say about the Christian hope is that it has a sure foundation because it's rooted in what God did on that first Easter morning as Christ was raised from the dead.

Secondly, as the hope has its foundation in God, its power too comes from the same source; something which at times we may all lose sight of in the busyness of our modern world and the pressures placed on us, or that we place on ourselves. From time to time we stop building our hopes and our aspirations on God and begin to build them on ourselves. When we do, that is so often when we fall into trouble, even despair.

We all have a part to play in building God's kingdom: we are God's servants and God's tools, but God must be our hope, our foundation, and our strength. What are Thomas' words as he places his hope in the risen Christ? **"My Lord and my God!"**

Thirdly, the hope of the resurrection is not about simply patching things up or; making good: it is about restoring things to the way God intended them to be.

It's a bit like a building originally constructed with a limited life expectancy of say thirty years. Now some fifty plus years have passed and it is still in use - constantly being patched up and repaired - a mere shadow of what was. There does come a point when total reconstruction is the only way forward and repair is no longer a viable option.

The same is true of the resurrection hope, it is not about patching up or covering up sin - it is about removing it altogether - it is about rebirth.

We see this idea repeatedly in scripture, both in the Old and New Testament: God not just tinkering at the edges but rebuilding completely.

St Paul, in his letter to the Romans looks forward to a day when the Kingdom of God will be established in its fullness: *“All of creation waits with eager longing for God to reveal his children. For creation was condemned to lose its purpose, not of its own will, but because God willed it to be so. Yet there was the hope that creation itself would one day be set free from its slavery to decay and would share the glorious freedom of the children of God. For we know that up to the present time all of creation groans with pain, like the pain of childbirth. But it is not just creation alone which groans; we who have the Spirit as the first of God’s gifts also groan within ourselves, as we wait for God to make us his children and set our whole being free.”*

The ultimate resurrection hope is for the Kingdom of God to be established and seen in its fullness, for the renewing power of God to touch everything. We live our lives in the period between Christ’s resurrection and that fulfillment. As Paul says we groan within ourselves at so much that is around us, in a world is often marred by pain and suffering.

What the resurrection hope should give us is a glimpse of what will be. It should give us the strength and the courage to move forward with confidence knowing that nothing is impossible for God, allowing God to use us as his tools - his servants.

Thomas, a week after the resurrection, was given the most wonderful opportunity to touch and see for himself the risen Jesus. The result was that his hope was to become a resurrection hope. Jesus said this to him *“Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”*

Hope is *“to look with expectation and desire”* The resurrection hope is to look with expectation and desire at God’s renewing hand at work, even in the seemingly impossible; a hope based on the reality of the resurrection of Jesus. The challenge this season gives to us is to be part of making that hope a reality.

Look at each of the gospels and they end with the disciples being commissioned to share that hope. That is our challenge.

As we reflect on the Easter hope, let us meditate on the words of “The Easter Anthems” - a canticle which sums so much of this.

Christ our passover has been sacrificed for us:

so let us celebrate the feast,

not with the old leaven of corruption and wickedness:

but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

Christ once raised from the dead dies no more:

death has no more dominion over him.

In dying he died to sin once for all:

in living he lives to God.

See yourselves therefore as dead to sin:

and alive to God in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Christ has been raised from the dead:

the first fruits of those who sleep.

For as by man came death: by man has come also the resurrection of the dead;

for as in Adam all die: even so in Christ shall all be made alive.

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit; as it was in the beginning is now and shall be for ever. Amen.