

“Jesus, Hope and a Practical Eschatology...”

9/12/18

I speak in the name of Jesus the Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit, to the glory of God the Father.

Amen.

How do we build hope?

My earliest experiences of hope as a child are vividly imprinted in my memory banks. My father was offered an advertising executive position in Zimbabwe (what was then Rhodesia) many years ago. His family, as well as my mother's, were based in Cape Town and thus the result was that for five years there was the annual car journey to Cape Town for Christmas. This trip covered some 2500 kms. The roads during the early 1970s were not what they are today. There were vast distances between towns and the traffic load was substantially less. My father, for various reasons, chose to often drive through the night. I always seemed to land up sitting on the backseat behind him. The 27 hr trip would always come with its highs and lows. I vividly remember how I would sit on the backseat staring out of the window into the dark sky watching the dark shadows of the telephone poles whizz by, one after another. My spirits would often sink very low during those lengthy hours in the dark. My mother and my siblings would be fast asleep and I would sit and monitor the drive, never knowing how long before the next town would approach on the horizon. I had no concept of time or distance but I knew that I could hold onto the hope of the light... the lights of the approaching town in the far distance... I would earnestly scour the dark horizon and eagerly seek the distant lights. These lights represented hope, safety, warmth and civilisation. The moment the faint lights started to appear through the smudgy windscreen, I would transfer my focus from the telephone poles to the growing lights in the distance. My spirits started to lift.

The lights became my hope.

When we eventually entered the town we were passing through, my spirits relaxed and I felt safe. Often, the very first building upon entering a town was a

petrol station with the obligatory Coke sign lit up. So, in time I began to associate light and hope with Coke, too!

How do we build hope?

Hope can be both fleeting and disappointing if we build it on the wrong foundations.

Some people hope for more money or wealth and then are bitterly disappointed when they achieve their goal and their feelings of hope and well-being remain unfulfilled.

Some people, weirdly, build their hope on the past. They believe that the past was a better place for all and they firmly believe that if we return to the way we lived in the past, all will be well. Sadly, this remains true for some people in our country who believe that life during Apartheid was better than life today in South Africa. I would be so bold as to call this delusional.

Some Christians focus very strongly on the future of God's Kingdom. Their focus and attention is only on the Rapture and Heaven. Little to no focus or attention is placed on the reality and challenge of living as a Christian in the real world today. This is known in theological circles as a Futuristic Eschatology.

(You may be wondering what the word "Eschatology" means? This is the study (Greek *logos*) of the last things (Greek *eschaton*) i.e. the end of the world, the Last Judgement, the Second Coming of Christ, the Resurrection of the body and in general, anything relating to the future.

So, some Christians build their hope on the future of God's Kingdom and they make strong reference to John 14:2 which says, " My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you?"

Some Christians focus on the here and now in terms of living in society today as a Christian. These Christians believe that the Kingdom of God is already manifesting around us and to only believe in a Futuristic Eschatology is ignoring what is already prevalent in our lives. These Christians believe that God is already active in the world and it is now our responsibility to continue to build the Kingdom of God, here and now, so that more people are brought to

faith through the Gospel and thus the world continues to become a better place for all. This is known as a Realised Eschatology.

(I have, for the sake of this sermon simplified many of these terms. There are far more complex theological definitions around the understanding of eschatology. Please feel free to do some reading around the subject)

I believe that there is strength in both the Futuristic and Realized Eschatology. They both have a value in our lives. The danger comes in when we are extreme in either, for example, imagine for a moment the Christian who focuses solely on their death and afterlife and thus lives a wasted life in the meantime? Similarly, imagine for a moment, the Christian who is so focused on the reality of current living, where is their hope when it comes to their deathbed?

Therefore, I propose as balanced Christians, who believe in the importance of both now AND the future that we consider the term, "Practical Eschatology". Here the idea would be that while we acknowledge and value the hope and meaning that the future may bring in the completion of God's Kingdom one day, we also focus strongly on the Kingdom of God around us.

This is what Jesus did.

Jesus preached and lived a life that built a real hope around him on a daily basis. He worked hard within His context to make a real difference in people's lives, so that they could experience the love of God in many different ways. Jesus healed the sick, raised the dead, forgave the sinners and taught the laos. He made a difference. He believed in the here and now and accepted that He was called by His Father to engage and build hope.

Similarly, Jesus often preached about the future and a better tomorrow. This was part of His personal narrative. BUT, He preached hope for a better tomorrow WHILST building a better today! This is core to His ministry. It was balanced and practical. **He lived hope while preaching it.**

This is exactly what we are called to do this Advent as we prepare the way for the birth of our Lord. Just as John the Baptist did in the Gospel reading this morning, so too are we called to prepare the way.

How do we do this?

How do we live hope whilst praying for a better tomorrow?

Exactly that.

We are called as Christians to live out our daily lives here on Earth making a difference to as many people, as possible. That means acknowledging and accepting our gifts and then sharing them so that the Kingdom of God continues to be built, here and now. Jesus is less concerned if your gift is making tea or literally building a new church hall. What He does care about is whether or not you are using whatever gift you have to the best of your ability, to contribute towards our collective hope and the building of the kingdom.

There has never ever been a more important time in our country to build through the sharing of hope. Many people feel our country has lost its way. We can make a difference by being the difference. Yesterday, whilst departing to an old age home to give a parishioner the last rites, a colleague asked me why do I do this? I replied that it my way of giving back, my way of giving hope to the world.

What is yours?

Similarly, whilst we make a difference in the world around us, doing the things that we do, we are also called to worship, pray, celebrate the sacraments and acknowledge all things heavenly. There is nothing wrong with this. It is part of our hope too. When we live a practical and balanced life as a Christian, holding in tension our Realised Eschatology with our Futuristic Eschatology, we find ourselves immersed in a Practical Eschatology that brings the beauty of heaven into our lives on a daily basis as we live our lives looking forward, towards the light and being one with Jesus.

Hope is eternal.

Hope is essential.

Hope is what we live for on a daily basis.

Hope is what makes our lives worth living.

Hope is what makes a difference.

Hope is Jesus.

May we continue, as Christians, this Advent, to build our intrinsic hope, by living and celebrating our lives and love for Jesus, whilst building His kingdom in the here and now, not forgetting the beauty of what is to come.

Let us pray.

O People of Sion, behold, the Lord is nigh at hand to redeem the nations: and in the gladness of your heart the Lord shall cause His glorious voice to be heard. Hear, O thou Shepherd of Israel: thou that leadest Joseph like a sheep.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end.

Amen.