

Time for God – Take 2

Purpose: To assist the congregation with further reflection on the theme of the Sunday service/passage.

Week beginning Sunday 20 October 2019 A New Hope

Pray Praise God that in spite of all the turmoil and uncertainty in the world he is utterly committed to being with us. Thank him for the hope that he have, not just of heaven, but of a meaningful future here. Ask for the grace to appreciate the nature of our future in step with Jesus – in the short term as well as the longer term. Pray for vision to see the benefits of hope among the here and now.

Read Read the passage (preferably in an easy to understand version). Jeremiah 31: 27 - 34.

Background The situation for God's people is as it was – still in exile in Babylon. Perhaps a little more realism about the long term nature of their removal from Israel. However, there is a significant change in tone from Jeremiah. A word from God through him – with a note of encouragement to the people. No immediate respite from their captivity – but they are given assurances that a day of release would come. A new hope was in the offing, something to look forward to, to work towards, even just to hang on to. Sometimes we need something to aim at, to keep us going – and this was held out to keep the people from despair, to encourage them to hold fast to God and to his promises. Their current difficulties persisted but they were able to view them in a different light. God would bring about a resolution – in the meantime that hope afforded them the wherewithal to keep at it – keep the faith!

Possible questions/points to consider

1. Jeremiah tends to have a reputation for being a bit of a “doom and gloom” merchant. Certainly he would not have been expected to be the source of hope. He had tried to dampen any thought of a “quick fix” or early return from exile but the tone here is changing. Why does continued downheartedness, focus on troubles and challenges tend to lead to despair? What role does encouragement and hope play in how we face troubles in everyday life? Why can false hope backfire? How do we ensure that hope is well founded and does not ignore the difficulties we face?
2. Hope neither removes all our difficulties nor is it entirely something for the future. In Christian terms how does our hope of heaven cast a positive ray on earthly difficulties? It has been said “The Christian faith is really about pie in the sky when you die”. How would you answer such criticism? Last week we were thinking about the need to commit ourselves to our communities. How might Christian hope be of benefit to a largely secular society? How might our view of the future (and esp of God's promises) encourage us to be more committed to the communities in which we live?
3. False hope or a misreading of God's promises such as suggesting that if we believe in God he will keep us away from all trouble is manifestly untrue and extremely harmful to individuals and the cause of the gospel. Why do so many people hanker after a God who they “hope” will keep troubles at bay? Jesus was very honest about the challenges and difficulties that his followers would face? How might we be more honest about these matters? How might it help if people were more aware of God among us in and through the challenges and difficulties?
4. (Ignore if you are not into Star Wars!) The original movie – Star Trek Episode IV: A New Hope introduces us to the young Luke Skywalker – and his part in the rebellion against the evil Empire. Essentially, it was a story of hope that good would triumph over evil, that seeming weak and inadequate individuals could play a significant part in re-establishing good – with the power of the Force. What pointers (if any) are there from the film for the mission of the Church in our day and age?
5. Feel free to explore any topics from the passage/theme even if they weren't raised on Sunday.

Prayer: Lord, thank you that the hope you offer us in Jesus is not wishful thinking or something nebulous for the distant future. Help us to be encouraged and strengthened by it as we work together to live appropriately for the gospel in the rough and tumble of the world, for Jesus' sake. Amen.