

THE ANGLICAN CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER, FRANKLIN MA

Job 19:23-27a, 2 Thessalonians 2:13-3:5, Luke 20:27-38

***The essence of the Christian faith is that believers are in Christ;
this reality is the source of hope and transformed lives.***

November 10, 2013

A couple of weeks ago I said, “The Good News is that...if we are **in Christ** [one of Paul principle messages in the first chapter of Ephesians] ... if we are **in Christ**, we have a Helper, the Holy Spirit. The Letter of James says, ‘[God] gives more grace. Therefore [Scripture] says, “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble”.... Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.’ [4:6, 10 ESV] Jesus said, ‘For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.’ Warren Wiersbe wrote: ‘Pride opens the door to every other sin, for once we are more concerned with our reputation than our character, there is no end to the things we will do just to make ourselves ‘look good’ before others.’”

The Nairobi Communique, issued at the conclusion of the recent Global Anglican Future Conference (GAFCON), begins with these verses from Ephesians: “You are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. (Ephesians 2:19-20)” The *Communique* includes this statement: “There is much we can learn from the East African Revival about having a change of heart. Beginning in the last century, the Revival has touched millions of lives across many countries as the Holy Spirit has moved lay men and women, as well as clergy, to share the gospel with others. Two significant features of great relevance to our situation are:

- Real repentance for sin demonstrated both in confession of guilt and a desire to make amends.

- A confidence that the gospel has the power both to save the lost in all the world and to transform the church, rather than seeing the church conformed to the world.

“We urge those who have promoted the false gospel to repent of their unfaithfulness and have a renewed confidence in the gospel. We repent of indifference, prayerlessness and inactivity in the face of false teaching. We remind them – as we remind ourselves – that the sins from which we must repent are not simply those which the world also believes are wrong; they are those that God himself abhors and which are made clear in his Word.”

If you're interested in what's happening within the Anglican Communion around the world – it's all about reformation in the church of Jesus Christ – I urge you to read the entire *Communique*; it's available on line and there're copies of it in the back of the church.

Look at the front of your bulletin: as a local congregation of the Body of Christ – the one holy catholic and apostolic Church – our vision is to be “a community transformed by Jesus Christ, living out His mission in ministry.” We're called together as brothers and sisters in Christ – in community – to let go of our pride and self-centeredness and to join together with Jesus in His ongoing work in the world. We pray in our parish prayer: “Help us to boldly share and live out the Gospel in our daily lives with those that are living in darkness and those in need.... We are His hands and feet.”

The essence of the Christian faith is that believers are in Christ; this reality is the source of both hope and transformed lives. This was what caused the early Church to grow; this is what fueled the East African Revival; this is what can change us and change our communities and the world. This morning's readings can help us understand the world we live in and how the Gospel brings hope and transformation.

Let's take a brief look the Gospel reading. The Sadducees were powerful religious leaders in first century Palestine. They wanted to hold on to the way things were because *change* threatened the privileged status. Jesus was a challenge to the status quo so they joined with the Pharisees, with whom they seldom agreed, to entrap Him. Luke describes how they asked Jesus a very involved question about a woman who married seven brothers. What would happen when the seven husbands and the one wife were reunited in the resurrection? It's interesting to understand, as Luke points out, that the Sadducees didn't even believe in the resurrection.

Jesus said, "The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage, but those who are considered worthy to attain to that age and to the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage, for they cannot die anymore, because they are equal to angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection."

It isn't always easy to be a Christian; we're bombard with messages that encourage us to indulge our desires, our wants and even our addictions. There may not be enough to go around so grasp what you can and hold on it because you deserve it. Jesus' response to the Sadducees contrasts the difference between those who focus on life in this age and those who see the hope and transformation promised to citizens of God's kingdom.

Several years ago political commentator and film critic Michael Medved said that "a plague of pessimism" is infecting our society. As our children are exposed "to the dysfunctional elements in our current culture.... They lose faith. They lose confidence. And they lose resistance to the most deadly epidemic menacing our youth today ... the plague of pessimism." Medved blames the entertainment industry for giving our young people an "underlying message of hopelessness ... that encourages both self-pity and fear." "In the bizarre world of broadcast journalism, killing is always covered, while kindness is almost always

ignored. The more alarming a news item may seem, the more attention it automatically receives.”

The new Christians in Thessalonica may have looked at their culture as many of us look at our world. Paul had preached in the city for about three weeks. He proclaimed the Gospel – the good news of hope and transformation – but at the same time he enraged the leaders of the local synagogue and he had to be smuggled out of the city. He feared that the faith of these new believers was not mature enough to resist the immorality and hopelessness all around them, so he sent Timothy to find out what was going on. Timothy reported that the new believers were doing pretty well, but that they needed encouragement and answers to their questions. In today’s reading, Paul writes, “...stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter.”

Earlier in his first letter to the Thessalonians Paul had written about the return of Christ: “But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope.” Based on Jesus’ death and resurrection, he proclaimed that the “the dead in Christ will rise first” when Jesus returns in glory. Paul describes what will take place. “For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.” He urged the Thessalonian believers: “Therefore encourage one another with these words.” [4:13-18 ESV]

You and I may not be able to comprehend how all this will happen, but that doesn’t change Paul’s inspired conclusion. What is important to understand is that in both life and death, every believer is united with the Son of the living God and nothing can ever destroy that relationship. Paul wrote in Romans: “For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things

to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” [8:38-39 ESV] That is the Christian hope. Dr. Ralph Wilson comments: “The basic concept of Christian faith or belief is ‘trust,’ having enough confidence in God to be willing to rely on Him.” Paul wrote in Ephesians: “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.” [2:8-9 ESV]

This is our hope. This is the hope that we are called to share with a troubled world; a hope that can transform the lives of people infected with a “plague of pessimism.” As we look at the culture around us, it’s easy to be cynical and to despair about what is going on and wonder what the future holds on our families and ourselves – for our children and grandchildren. What we see in the world is not God’s plan for His people.

The hope we share with other believers is unique because it is not dependent on our good works; it doesn’t depend on the perfectibility of human nature by our own efforts or on the creation of a utopian society. It is unique because it is the plan of a holy, sovereign God who is in control; a God who, by His will, created the world with a purpose and loves us so much that He sent His only Son to reconcile those who are alienated from Him. “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” [John 3:16 ESV]

Many of us are studying Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians in our small group. In his excitement, Paul overflows with what God has done to save us, to rescue us from our “trespasses and sins.” He wrote: “And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience – among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of

wrath, like the rest of mankind. But [**that's a key word – BUT**] ... but God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ – *by grace you have been saved* – and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. *For by grace you have been saved through faith.* And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”

The Christian hope comes from the reality that believers are “alive together in Christ.” They receive new life; they are born again to a newness and fullness of life as they await with confidence the coming of Christ in glory and the completion of God’s plan for His world – “to unite all things in [Christ], things in heaven and things on earth.’ [Ephesians 1:10 ESV] What a difference there is when we enjoy that hope rather than being overcome by “a plague of pessimism.”

Never forget that *in Christ* we have been transformed – Ephesians, chapter 1: “In love [God] predestined us for adoption as sons [and daughters] through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, [**WHY**] to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.” [Ephesians 1:5-10 ESV]

I urge you to seek to live your life in a way that people who see you will ask, “What is the source of your confidence? What is the source of your hope?” And that you will be able to respond with assurance that the foundation of your hope is

your relationship with Jesus Christ. In Jesus we learn the difference between focusing on living as an adopted child of God rather than focusing on the things of the world.

The essence of our faith is that we are “*in Christ*,” nothing else provides greater hope or has greater power to transform lives and even entire societies. As members of the Church of Jesus Christ, we are to “encourage one another with these words.” We are to be “a community transformed by Jesus Christ, living out His mission in ministry.” We have the medicine to cure the plague of pessimism and mustn’t keep it for ourselves – we need to share it with our neighbors.

Despite the human wisdom, accusations and pessimism of his four “friends,” Job believed that God is good despite the apparent evidence to the contrary. Job was “rescued” by his faith. “For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. My heart faints within me!”

The essence of our hope as Christians is that we are *in Christ* and that this reality is the source of hope and transformed lives, but there are things to be done. Jesus said, “...let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.” That’s His challenge to each of us.

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