

Hope

Sunday 07 November 2021

Al and Maureen Johnson

Opening Prayer

Lord we ask not to be delivered from the tensions which are winding us up tight but show us in what direction we should go once wound, a sense of humour about our disappointments, and a sense of respect for the puzzlement of being human and a sense of gladness for your kingdom which comes in spite of our fretful pulling and tugging. Thank you for your presence with us now as we begin our worship time together.

Call to worship from Psalm 100

Shout for joy to the Lord all the earth

Worship the Lord with gladness: Come before Him with joyful songs

Know that the Lord is good

It is He who made us, and we are His; We are His people the sheep of His pasture

Enter His gates with thanksgiving and His courts with praise.

Give thanks to Him and praise His name.

For the Lord is good and His love endures for ever.

His faithfulness continues through all generations.

Song Let us sing to the God of salvation. No. 115.

O.T. Reading Psalm 91:1-6; 15,16.

Prayer (in song) Father we love you. Just let me say.

Video HOPE

Song All my hope on God is founded.

Share the peace.

Collection Prayer

Lord we thank you for your faithfulness. Thank you that we can always trust in you. You are an abundant God and out of your great mercy you have given us so much. We give you our offerings today. With them we worship you and give our whole selves to you. Please take them now and use them for your kingdom

and your glory Extend and multiply their reach and influence we pray. We ask all this in the powerful name of Jesus.

Prayer for ourselves and others

Creator God, We are all the work of Your hand. You are our Potter and we are the clay. You desire for us to be shaped into the best possible version of ourselves.

Redeemer God, we thank You that You are a loving Father and that You hear our cries. We cry out to You today and ask that You will deliver us from all of our troubles. We thank You that You are a mighty God and that nothing is impossible in You.

God, our Fortress, there is war in our minds right now. Your Word tells us to surrender everything to You in prayer, and then we will know Your peace. This precious promise is why we cry out to You now. Our minds can be battlegrounds, far from peaceful and is in great turmoil as if controlled by someone else. and we need Your protection. Lord Jesus, guard our hearts and minds, making them Your stronghold. Lead us out of the battle into Your safety. We pray that You will be the fence of protection around us.

God of all Comfort, we seek tranquillity. As we pray and meditate upon Your Word, our mind often drifts to our to-do lists and needs. We pause now from our day. We breathe out a deep sigh from within our souls and ask, will You please quiet my storm? Help us remember all Your goodness to each of us.

Lord Jesus, we pray today, asking you to bring calmness to those we know and love, who are not well, bring comfort to those we know who are struggling with disease or illness. Remove any discomfort. Remind them of your love as they go through this challenging time. Please help them to be faithful to the end. Remove anything that will bring fear and uncertainty in their hearts. As they fight these battles, remind them that they're not alone. You're holding them in the palm of your hand. Help them to remain positive throughout their treatment. May they continue to be grateful for all the things that you have blessed them with.

Lord, Creator and Sustainer, why did it have to happen like this? Why did it have to be our loved one? We can be so empty on the inside, Lord. We struggle to face some days. Please, Father, remove this hurt that grows in our hearts. Replace it with your unconditional love. Help the families who have recently been bereaved to understand that it is because of the deep love you have for each of us, that you have ushered them into your presence.

Lord, times and seasons are in your able hand. You know when we will be born

and when we will leave this earth. You knew when our loved one would not be with us. today. We want to praise you for the time we had with them. As we go through this mourning season, Lord, we pray that you give us a deep sense of peace. We know that no one can ever take the place of our loved one, that is why we are asking you to fill the gap that our loved one has left in our lives with your love. May we find comfort in you alone.

Father God, we pray for all our grandchildren, God, give them spiritual discernment. May you, Holy Spirit and your word direct them on the right path. Guard them from false teachings and incorrect understanding of your nature and your will. As they journey through this dry land, feed them and refresh them with your word and your wisdom.

We pray for all young people, at this time of the year, as they complete one part of their education or move into employment, grant them guidance in their relationships. Please lead them to the right connections and friendships. Direct their paths to cross with people who will help them grow in character and become the best people they have been created to be. Connect them with people who can lead and influence them in the right ways. Lord, you know all things, create situations for them to get in touch with someone who can introduce them to the future you have already chosen for them. Give them boldness to seize and pursue all opportunities and goals that you've planned for their lives.

We pray for our Nation

Heavenly Father, You guide the path of those who lead our nation. At times, troubles confuse their minds and problems mislead and disconcert their hearts. We pray for Your clear direction. May Your word give them understanding, and lead them in the responsibilities they have.

We pray for all peoples in the world. This plague has broken out and is running rampant amongst the nations. Many have fallen ill, and some have died. Nations are gripped with fear as they try desperately to eradicate the sickness. Lord, lay Your healing hand upon the face of the earth. Protect the young and the vulnerable. Provide healthcare for the poor or those in far off lands. Give doctors and healthcare workers strength and protection for their patients. Give researchers and scientist's wisdom and funding to develop treatments and cures. For even amid sickness, You are the light of the world.

Everlasting God, as in the days of old, nations continue to rage and rise against You and Your chosen. Truly, there is nothing new under the sun. Greed, malice, and strife consume entire peoples. Justice falls by the wayside. The rich feast, and the poor starve, many seek an abundance of life, but few will find it. For

narrow is the gate that leads to salvation. Lord, how much longer shall the world suffer under such conditions? Lord, all of creation cries out for Your redemption. Revive the hearts of all countries, that they might return to You and Your word.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father in Heaven, holy be your name.

Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.

Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours, now and forever.

Amen

New Testament reading

2 Timothy 1:7-13

Message

I guess most of us would agree with the statement "Life is difficult at times" - I don't think too many of us would argue with that?

Yes ..There's no question about it... life can be difficult and added to that we live in a world that is often a scary place to be.

- Last year the most searched word on a popular Bible app was FEAR. As Covid 19 surged around the globe, fears for health and safety were matched by concerns for the economy, mental health, education, housing and more. Even those who so far have avoided the disease found themselves crippled by anxiety. Christians were not and are not immune.

Life is very difficult at times—we won't argue that fact? We know that Jesus warns us that we will have trials and tribulations in this world-but we ask.... Why do children have to suffer because of someone else's sin. why are devoted Christians among the dead when a natural disaster or a terrorist attack occurs? ...Why does God heal one person and not another ... We don't understand and yet God states very clearly...

Isaiah 55:8-9—My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor your ways My ways. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. We don't understand God? And neither does Sheila Walshe who writes"

- "I don't understand why God works as He does ,but I do believe He is good all the time. Sometimes he delivers us from a situation, sometimes he calls us to walk with a limp, as it were, following Jesus the one who was wounded for us."

When we face fears that make us want to pull the covers over our heads and

retreat from the world, what will we put our hope in? Will we exert our energy in wishful thinking, crossing our fingers that our circumstances will change, or that this or that calamity will not touch us?...is that what we hope?

- Biblical hope, a Christian's hope, is not wishful thinking. It's not a lucky chance. It's not ungrounded optimism. No..what it is, is a rock-solid belief in the character of God. That's not to say we are guaranteed rose bushes without thorns, or a life free from tragedy, disaster or difficulty...But because we know that God is all knowing and all powerful, and FOR us, we can face down our fears and trust the outcome of our circumstances to Him.

Hebrews 11 says: "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen:" The antidote to fear is faith. And faith gives us hope in the midst of whatever scary thing we face.

This morning I want to look at two examples of biblical faith/hope in action. Two scenarios of prisoners facing execution...one that took place 2000 years ago and another more recently.

Our first scenario is found in our scripture reading this morning from 2 Timothy

- Paul, is a prisoner in Rome...on death row for being a follower of Jesus - manacled to a Roman soldier 24 hours a day, in a dark cell, abandoned by many of his friends, as to visit him is to risk their own lives.

2 Timothy is considered to be Paul's last known writing - his famous "last words" as he awaited his execution. Was there something he wanted to say before he died?...Yes, there was...in this last letter to Timothy, Paul encourages Timothy reminding him of the good news of the gospel and encouraging him to stand firm against the false teachings and persecutions rife at that time.

- Yet as I read and reread this scripture—to me it is Paul's confidence and hope in Christ that glows like a beacon out of the darkness of his cell . As Paul wrote to Timothy he was witnessing to the fact that he knew God. He didn't just know about him..He knew Him a personal way that comes across very powerfully in our scripture today

Look at his words as he explains that he is not ashamed of being imprisoned for witnessing for Christ.

That is why I am suffering here in prison. But I am not ashamed of it for I know the one in whom I trust, and I am sure that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until the day of His return

- What had Paul entrusted to Him, well yes, Timothy and the good news of the gospel ..BUT..I believe it was Paul himself. Paul had committed his life to Christ, had given his body and soul into the care and keeping of God's son, and was trusting Him through death and beyond.

To me it is almost as if Paul is saying :There is no assurance of what tomorrow holds for any of us—we don't know what tomorrow may bring...but we can always trust in the promises of God's faithfulness and steadfastness no matter what may come our way...today is the day the Lord has made..don;t let tomorrows concerns and fears paralyze us into missing the blessings and grace God gives us today!

Let's just hold on to that thought..leave Paul for a moment and move on to our second scenario.

- During the first week of August 2001 in Kabul Afghanistan, the Taliban arrested eight workers of the relief organization "Shelter Now". The two men and six women were from Australia, USA and Germany. They spent a total of 14 weeks in five different prisons in Kabul. After September 11 and the subsequent attacks on Afghanistan the Taliban declared them to be hostages and they found themselves pawns in the worldwide war on terrorism, facing uncertainty and probable execution.

During that period it was their faith in God that brought them comfort and they wrote a number of worship songs during their times in prison together.

- Like Paul's letter to Timothy these songs were written during a scary time. Yet they are an expression of a time of their trust in the kindness and the continued hope found in the living God.

This trust helped them to keep their inner peace and hope even through the war when bombs were falling all around them, and in their prison they had to listen to the sounds of execution and cries of torture, and wonder what tomorrow would bring! Those aid workers were afraid, of course they were, but that fear didn't crush them. They looked instead to the hope and certainty of God's promises that they had such confidence in come what may...Listen to this...

- "Heather began to read verses out of the Bible, and we sang the songs we had composed ourselves while in prison. I was amazed that none of the Taliban tried to stop us. I can still remember how reading the scriptures, singing songs of praise turned my panic into an inner calm, more intense than I had ever experienced before.

It was basically what is described in the Bible as "a peace that passes all understanding—it was so real it was almost tangible. Suddenly I realized God is still here with me..I don't have to worry, He will have a solution."

The eight were eventually removed from prison by Afghan fighters who opposed the Taliban rule and taken to freedom just before the Taliban recaptured the city.

One of them commented after their release.....

- There is no reason as to why some must suffer more than others but I continue to trust and believe that God's ways are good and He always knows best. I know that it was a miracle that we came out alive and unharmed in our situation, never the less the fact remains that God will still be good whether or not we had died in prison. His promises will still be true and He would still be a God who answers prayer.

To me the miracle was the fact that they could sincerely praise God in their situation. I see a parallel in Paul's story. As he wrote to Timothy he knew he wasn't about to be set free from prison, and yet the miracle was that he still trusted God as he faced death...death never was and never is, the end for those that have committed their lives to Christ!

- Paul knew, as did the Taliban's prisoners that, for a Christian, Death is a passageway into eternity with God—death itself is not to be feared—it is part of the hope that we have in Christ—a shedding of this earthly body and the entering into a new experience, an extension of "life in all its fullness! That is beyond our present understanding..but WOW! One day we will know and we will understand, and it will be awesome to cross the barrier and see Jesus face to face!
- Out of Paul's life experiences came so many of the scriptures of encouragement we have today.
- Out of the Aid workers experiences came some beautiful songs of praise and worship, and encouragement to stand firm in the hope we have in Christ. Both Paul's letters to Timothy and these songs were written under duress, in prison, in times of deprivation and uncertainty.

Like Paul's words, the words of those songs came from the hearts of people who know their Lord personally.—those who can say as Paul did..

"I know the one in whom I trust and I am sure that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until the day of His return."

- Do you know God in that way? Do you have a personal relationship with Him through trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ? Have you admitted your need of a saviour and asked Jesus into your life as your Saviour and Lord. Is your HOPE Biblical ...set in Jesus Christ and His return, the hope of eternity with Him and the assurance of His presence with you now, every moment of the day.

(Take a moment to think about that!)

- Fortunately the Bible doesn't whitewash human nature, or paint a picture of a pain free world. Life can raise, as I commented earlier, hard questions.

King David was facing hard times of family rebellion and betrayal when he wrote Psalm 62 and these words: "He alone is my rock and my salvation:He is

my fortress. I will never be shaken.” Whatever the circumstances David chose to focus on God.

- If you consider the last part of this verse David sounds supremely confident in His God He says “I will never be shaken (NIV) Nothing would rattle his faith! But the English Standard Version offers a glimpse of David humanness it says “I shall not be greatly shaken” And I think this translation may be more real life. Acknowledging that in reality events can shake the faith of even the most devoted follower of Christ.

But David vows “not to be greatly shaken. The shaking isn’t down to the core of his convictions and the shaking doesn’t last long..after all he knows to turn to His Lord, who is His rock, his salvation and his fortress.

- So how do we make these stories about Paul, a giant for God and Aid workers/Missionaries and David relevant to us, here in Oamaru, in Covid Delta NZ and all the changes and confusions we are having to deal with at this time, along with any health, relationship or financial problems we may have?
- Well I guess we are all afraid at some time of the uncertainties of life, the way things change so quickly that we can’t get a grasp on them...when those times happen we have a choice...we can pull the bedclothes over our heads and hope it will all go away or change back to how it used to be”...not likely!!
- OR like David, Paul and the Missionaries ask God to help us focus on Him, not the problem..and in doing so remember to stand on the promises of God found in scripture..... that will bring us hope and peace in uncertain times.

I want to finish with such a promise from God in Phil 4:19

And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of His glory in Christ Jesus.”

- (Note it says NEEDS not WANTS...and it applies to spiritual as well as physical needs. It’s a wonderful promise isn’t it. But let’s not forget that this does not mean that we will be shielded from the ups downs of life.
- BUT if we are “in Christ”. In a personal relationship with Jesus and walking in step with the Holy Spirit, then the battle is God’s and He will bring us through it. If we stay close to Him, bring those concerns to Him in prayer, look to His words and His people for comfort and example, if we face the fear and don’t let the concerns of tomorrow paralyze us from experiencing His comfort and grace today..then hope has won..and we, if we listen carefully could hear Him repeating His promises..

Fear not I am with you, and difficult as this present situation may be, this too will pass—for you are my precious child, and you have my word that I will never leave you alone. Trust me, lean on me, together we will overcome!”

My hope is in Jesus, His work, His promises, His presence and His protection, beyond today—for eternity!

As C.S. Lewis says “A Christian’s hope isn’t an escape, or wishful thinking, but it is something a Christian is meant to do.

Take a moment to consider where your hope lies....

*Let’s pray: Thank you for your promise that you will never leave us or forsake us...that you are there 24/7 surrounding us with your love and grace. When situations arise causing us to become fearful of what the future, even the very next day may bring, draw us closer to you, remind us of the hope we have in Christ, and the blessings we receive from you each day, which **are** there even in the most difficult of days..*

May we find comfort in your word and the promises given, and an assurance of whatever the future holds that nothing, nothing can separate us from your love.

Lord we affirm that you are the one we trust and we are certain that you are able to keep what we have entrusted (ourselves) to you for eternity. Lord we believe, Amen.

Benediction

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all.