

“Hope That’s More Than a Wish”

Romans 13:11-14 ¹¹ Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; ¹² the night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; ¹³ let us live honorably as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. ¹⁴ Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

“Hope That’s More Than a Wish”

I was in elementary school in the Seventies, a child growing up in the U.S. during the Cold War. I remember not only having to do bomb drills in case someone made a bomb threat, but also having to do nuclear bomb drills. A catastrophic, fiery, apocalyptic end to the world was a fear constantly on my mind, on the nation’s mind. I don’t know what was like up here. I’m sure the same fear encompassed you because any nuclear exchange between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. would have occurred by means of Canadian airspace. Yet, besides that menacing fear, life for me growing up was rather hopeful. I looked forward, dreamed of getting a college education, of having a good paying job and doing financially better than my parents, of having a wife and family. I had dreams and for the most part I could expect they would come about. That’s hope, real hope, not some wish that life might be good some day. That hope even got better when the Berlin Wall came down and the Soviet Union collapsed. I thought “now I can live out my days in peace and so can my children”; that is unless space aliens invaded earth. I don’t know if you folks noticed but after the Berlin Wall came down the West no longer had a “common enemy” that Hollywood could vilify, so movies about space aliens began to proliferate.

Life must be a bit different for children in elementary school now. Children today are living in the post-Cold War world amidst what we in the West call a War on Terror, but for certain people of a certain fundamentalist wing of a certain other world religion, they call it a holy war on the Western way of life. Yet, this post-9/11 world isn’t the product of religion. It is simply the aftermath of the Cold War. Israel, Syria, Turkey, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, North Korea, Eastern Europe, the former Soviet nations, and the Central American nations were all pawn nations in the Cold War, oppressed pawns. Afghanistan and Central America were where the battles were actually fought. At the end of the Cold War everyone thought there would be peace not greater fear. Today’s children must grow up with the fear of not only a global nuclear exchange, but also nuclear terrorism; and not just nuclear terrorism, but also run of the mill terrorist attacks on public places. Today’s children will also have to live with the effects of global warming, global overpopulation, and pandemics such as HIV-AIDS (which according to the 2007 UNAIDS report appears to have begun to level off and in some places even decline). If current economic trends continue most of our children will not have their share of the pie. Actually, the one disillusion of my generation has been that we are not financially better off than our parents and this trend will continue.

“Hope That’s More Than a Wish”

The future for today’s children does not look hopeful. I don’t think that I am exaggerating in saying all they have to look forward to are cooler electronic gadgets, faster computers, extremely life-like video games, and more potent street drugs. Hopelessness defines life today. Our children cannot dream like I did. When they look at the future all they can see is a huge overwhelming mess and the demand for a lot of hard work to clean up after the parties that their parents and grandparents and even great-grandparents have been throwing. It is a twisted world when children have to clean up after their parent’s parties.

Powerlessness defines life today as well. No one seems to believe that we as individuals have control over our lives and can do things that can bring about change. Among ministers we often joke that “there are a few people in that church who need to die before anything will ever change.” Well, there are a few people on this planet who need to die before anything will change, but even when those people die as long as human greed and powerlust are part of the human condition things will not change.

This overwhelming sense of hopelessness and powerlessness is taking its toll on global life. It promotes violence. If things cannot be changed, then blow something up particularly something that belongs to one of those people who need to die anyway. It also promotes the magical thinking of fundamentalism where if you believe right and live right God will be on your side. Unfortunately, power hungry people with even a little bit of charisma find it very easy to manipulate the hopeless and powerless with fundamentalism whether it be religious, environmental, or political. Materialism and consumerism are also a resulting plague. If there’s nothing in the future to live for, then live for the day. Self-destructive and risky adrenalin-inducing behaviours also plague life. In a global culture that is emotionally depressed as we humans are people will do anything to feel pleasure, anything.

But, what about us Christians; we actually claim to have hope. What do we mean by hope? First, we have hope based in the immediacy of God’s presence with us and his intervention in our lives. Second, we have the future of the second coming of Jesus Christ when there will be the resurrection and God makes all things new. Our hope is more than a wish. We do not say I wish God was with me and I wish that he would intervene on my behalf. Anyone who has been a Christian for any length of time knows certainly that God is personally present with us each and with the congregation where we worship and that God does intervene on our behalf. I’m not stepping out on limb to say that for most of us we call ourselves Christian not because we were born in a “Western Christian nation and Christianity is the religion of my culture.” No, we call ourselves Christian because we know most certainly that God is with us, with us each and God has indeed intervened in our lives for our good. Our hope is real and if we know God and his work in our lives now in the present then we know that what God promises for the future will occur. Jesus Christ will come back, there will be no more sin and death, and God will put his world to rights. Since our hope is real, based on the fact that God is present and active in our lives; we must ask what difference this hope makes and if we have hope, how then should we live?

“Hope That’s More Than a Wish”

There is a street ministry in Hollywood, CA called Youth Link of America. They are located on Hollywood Blvd. which seems to be a Mecca for runaway youth because they have delusional dreams of being or at least meeting a star. On their website they suggest ways people might assist in their ministry. There is obviously the request that people donate money. Yet, they also give a simple request that people pray for four things: safety for the youth, that they might be able to build relationships with the youth, for the spiritual and emotional strength to reach out to them, and the resources to meet the needs of the young people. To answer our first question about what difference our real hope can make in today’s world; well, we know that there is something to this thing called prayer. As far as what we who have this real hope can do; well, first of all pray and then strive to work for the kingdom coming. I think the prayer request that Youth Link America makes is exactly what is needed for this entire world.

Every person on this planet needs to know safety and it is the work of Christians to pray and to strive for real peace in this world. God has not made himself present to us and intervened in our lives so that we simply continue on like everybody else. We are called to change, to follow. Jesus said blessed are the peacemakers, not blessed are the money makers. It is our task in this world to make peace by calling evil, evil, and evil doers, evil doers; to call injustice, injustice; to call greed, greed. It is our task to call the offender to honesty and the victim to forgiveness. Real peace, safety is based in honesty and forgiveness.

Every person on this planet needs to have relationships where trust and unconditional love can be found. Friends, this is why there is a church. This is why Jesus commands his followers this one commandment, “Love one another as I have loved you.” The ultimate result of God’s presence in our lives is the creation of human community where love in the image of God can be found. God has made himself known to us so that we might build relationships with others in which the unconditional love of God, God himself, can be known.

Every person on this planet needs the emotional and spiritual strength to move forward in life. Everyone needs to know the freedom and healing that comes with knowing Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit; freedom and healing from enslavement to addictions, the pain of childhood neglect and abuse; freedom from bearing grudges; and the freedom and healing that comes from forgiving. The greatest healing came in my life when Christ Jesus showed me that he loved and was gracious to certain people I was bearing a life-time grudge against, even though my grudge was based in the right. You see, there is a fine line between wanting God to avenge the wrongs done to us and bearing a grudge that becomes our life’s major pre-occupation that only results in self destruction and petty retaliation. The church is the only human community where forgiveness is the rule of the day, and praise be to God, he gives us the strength to forgive and to move forward. Christians who hold grudges are the most damnable of all people, no matter the wrong suffered. There is no greater blasphemy than someone who knows the Lord and yet, refuses to forgive.

Finally, it is not only the work of Christians to pray that everybody in the world gets their daily bread; it is also to work for the equal distribution of wealth around the world. This means that we Christians in the West need to put a limit

“Hope That’s More Than a Wish”

on what honestly is enough and give the rest away. It means that we must simplify our lifestyles. This is more than just reducing our carbon footprint. It is for love of neighbour and love of God learning to live with and on much less than we are accustomed to. We who know that the future is in God’s hands because we know his presence in the present, simply cannot model to the rest of the world a lifestyle that lives for the present. We must model the lifestyle that respects in love the needs of all peoples and strive for the end of poverty not only with what we put in our refrigerators, but also who we vote for.

We’ve been graciously given a real reason to hope, my friends; a very real reason. God is with us...and we know it. Let us not take his graciousness towards us in vain. Let’s live this hope openly before the world. Amen.