

SERMON: “Words of Hope: *I Believe in the Life Everlasting.*”

Rev. Geoff Ross. Easter Sunday, April 16, 2017.

St. Andrew’s, Brampton.

[Welcome. BJ’s Win! Leafs Win! Easter is a miracle!]

On Ash Wednesday we read the story of the raising of Lazarus and the exchange between Martha and Jesus in which she says that if Jesus had been there her brother would not have died; Jesus replies by telling her that he would “*rise again.*” Martha replied; “*Yes. I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.*” Jesus said to her, “*I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die.*” Then Jesus asks a question of Martha – the question that launched us into Lent and that challenges us today; “*Do you believe this?*” I do. And here’s why you should too.

Over the 20 years of my ministry I’ve been struck by how the battle grounds in our lives are not on the hills of lofty theological issues – like the Apostles’ Creed, but are instead fought in the trenches of whether we live in hope or not. Now, I’m a hope guy – and a grace guy; actually I’m really a “*My hope is grace*” guy – but it can be hard sometimes. I often get asked the question; ‘*how can you believe in a God who allows so much violence in the world?*’ I respond by saying that I believe in a God of grace who loves us and always has. But there’s more; the God of the Bible (the God I believe in) is a God who hopes – hopes for our restoration/redemption/salvation: God hopes to be-with us forever. This is our hope. And, it’s why Easter is so important.

The entire arc of the Bible – the entire story of God’s love has been building up to this moment: the fulfillment of all of God’s hope in the restoration and redemption of the creation before the creator. From before time – God hoped. From before creation, before Adam and Eve and the Garden, before the tree and the fall – in hope, God prepared for this moment to come. From before the flood, Abraham and Sarah – before the burning bush, Moses and the Exodus, before the wilderness and the Promised Land – God knew that one day this day would come. From before the nativity and the incarnation, before the wise men and the miracles – God knew that we would be here, today, celebrating with Him that our hope was fulfilled at Easter!

This is why God became Emmanuel/God with us. In Jesus He set aside His glory, took on human flesh, clothed Himself with humility, and entered our world to be-with us, to be one-with us so we would return to Him. (Jer. 24:7) And, right from the beginning, this was God’s plan – that the price for our sin would be a physical death and also a death to the sins that separate us from God. This is why Jesus paid the ransom price to free and restore us. He came to be-with us in order to die for us – revealing the extent of God’s love for us, a love that gives us hope that does not disappoint.

For Lent Rebekah and I have been preaching on the Apostles' Creed in a series called "*Words of Hope: I Believe in....*" (on website) While not strictly Biblical the Apostles' Creed is wholly founded on scripture - which is why the Creed begins with our professing our belief in the God of creation and grace revealed/shown in/through Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord who came to be-with us to die for us to save us. From Jesus the Creed shifts to the gift of the Holy Spirit and God's continuing work in/through the Church, and on to the hope of the final fulfillment of God's plan for our salvation. Like the Bible, the arc of the Creed is one of hope: it began with God and ends with our relationship with God restored forever as we proclaim in the final phrase, "*I believe in the life everlasting.*"

Before His conversation with Martha, Jesus met with a man named Nicodemus – a Pharisee says our reading – who had come to Jesus to question Him. Unexpectedly, Jesus begins to talk about what it will take for us to our one hope fulfilled: eternal life. Since Nicodemus has said that Jesus is from God, Jesus tells him that He will "*be lifted up*" – He will rise up and return to heaven – and that those who believe/have faith in him "*will have eternal life.*" He then goes on to reveal that "*God loved the people of this world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who has faith in him will have eternal life – that He sent him to save them.*"(John 3:16-17)

Today we are here to celebrate Easter – Jesus' resurrection – because it offers to us the ultimate hope; the promise of being born again into a life everlasting where death and sin are no more, that all things will be restored in a new heaven and a new earth to be-with and enjoy God again and forever. (Rev. 21:1-6) This is the hope that Paul tells us "*we were saved*" for. (Rom. 8:23-25) This is the hope we long for, the hope that gives us something to live for – it's the hope we're here to hear. Friends, the Good News of Easter – and the hope of the resurrection – is that in Jesus, God's hope and our hope meet; we will be raised with Him into the communion of saints, forgiven, resurrected/restored, to live the life everlasting... He is Risen – and because He has, we will too. Hallelujah! Amen.