



OUR CERTAIN HOPE – John 14:1-6, 25-27

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You don't have to read, listen or watch the news for very long before you realise that there is much uncertainty in our world. On a global level, we see wars and terrorism on every continent. The weather is increasingly erratic, going from the warmest on record to the coldest, from the wettest to the driest. Technologically, new inventions are coming at us so fast that there is no time to think about how to use them wisely and well and what the long-term effects might be. In our communities, we never know what our government is going to do next with interest rates, taxes, services and benefits. It is hard to plan for the future when these things keep changing. On a personal level, people in our own congregation have faced unexpected challenges from the death of a spouse or other close family member, a change in their health, upsets in their jobs, and difficult relationships.

We naturally feel vulnerable when facing these kinds of significant changes and uncertainties in our lives. We start to ask, "What can I depend on? Are there any certainties on which I can base my life?" We feel like the ground is moving beneath our feet and long for a solid rock on which to stand.

Jesus' disciples were facing such a time the evening before Jesus' death. They knew as they walked to Jerusalem for the Passover feast that they were walking into a dangerous situation. The religious leaders were increasingly upset with Jesus and openly plotting to discredit him and even kill him. The occupying force, the Romans, were always unpredictable as to how they would deal with local situations. Jesus had just told them again that he would die and that one of them would betray Him. I can just imagine how vulnerable and confused they must have felt.

Jesus was not unaware of their fears and anxieties. Into this situation, He speaks words of certainty and hope about their future and their present. And as He spoke to them, He speaks to us today.

Our future hope of life with God

Jesus starts by acknowledging that sometimes things are hard, and this can be troubling. He doesn't dismiss their fears, but he does tell them they don't have to be overwhelmed by

them. There is another option – trust in God. We can trust that God is bigger than whatever happens to us. Later in this conversation, Jesus will say,

Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33)

We may not understand what is happening. Jesus’ disciples certainly didn’t understand as Thomas’ comment illustrates, but Jesus encourages them to trust Him anyway. He has everything under control, and He loves them. They can trust Him to take care of them.

But there is something more specific that Jesus wanted His disciples to know. He is going away, but only to prepare the way for them to be with Him and the Father. He initially left them when He died on the cross. But His death was necessary for Him to be able to say, *“I am the way, the truth and the life”*. (v. 6) He became **the way** when he took the penalty for our sins and broke down the barrier between us and God. He became **the truth** as his death exposed the falsehood that we are good enough on our own. He became **the life** when He rose from the dead, defeating sin and death. When Jesus came back to His followers – to the women at the tomb and eventually the rest of the disciples on several occasions – He came back having provided access to the Father.

Forty days later, Jesus left them again. This time He went back to the Father in heaven and sat down at His right hand as the head of the church. From there in heaven, he is guiding history and watching over His people. But we know that this is not the end. He promises that, *“When everything is ready, I will come and get you, so that you will always be with me where I am.”* (v. 3)

What a wonderful thing we have to look forward to! This life, which is often troublesome, is not all there is for us. We have a certain hope of life with God beyond the grave. And with Him, there is plenty of room for everyone. Like the grandparents who buy a house with a couple of extra bedrooms so all their children and grandchildren can come visit, God’s heaven has *“many places to dwell”* (v. 2); more than enough for all who believe in Him.

Our present hope of God with us

And while we wait for our glorious future in heaven, Jesus doesn’t leave us to fend for ourselves. In this discussion with the disciples, he mentions two gifts that He gives us to help us now as we deal with the uncertainties of our lives.

Gift #1 – The Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is sent by the Father in Jesus’ name, to represent Him in His absence. The word, translated “Advocate” here means “someone who comes alongside” and is translated also as Comforter, Counsellor, Helper or even Friend. He stands by us so that we are not alone. Jesus tells His disciples that one of His roles is to remind them of the things He has told them and teach them how to apply those things to their lives. In other words, the Holy Spirit helps us to think “Christianly” about the situations we face – how we face sickness, death, financial setbacks, and relationship issues. When we think rightly about these things, we are less afraid, and it is easier to trust God. The Holy Spirit is with us in the vulnerability of uncertainty and points us to the certainty we have in God’s love for us.

Gift #2 – Peace

The world around us thinks that peace comes from the absence of trouble. God shows us how to have peace in spite of trouble. This peace doesn't come from avoiding troubles or being stronger than troubles. This peace comes from trust and rest in God's love for us and His control. Nothing takes Him by surprise, and He is able to carry us through whatever happens. We experience this peace as we take our troubles and fears to God and allow Him to give us His peace which is stronger. The Bible tells us:

*You will keep in perfect peace all who trust in you,
all whose thoughts are fixed on you! (Isaiah 26:3)*

As a child, I learned a chorus that I often sang to myself in bed at night if I was frightened or worried about something. I'm sure many of you know it as well.

Turn your eyes upon Jesus,
look full in his wonderful face,
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim
in the light of His glory and grace.

It helped me remember that the one who loved me so much that He died for me, is also able to help me through any problem that I was worried about. It is not that we ignore our problems or deny our fears, but that we take these things to God and trust Him to have all that is needed to carry us through them. Then His peace can fill our hearts and minds and strengthen us to move forward.

Conclusion

Jesus was talking with His disciples on the eve of His death. He knew what was ahead, and how it would affect those closest to Him. There would be the immediate desolation of His death and the excitement of His resurrection – events they would only truly understand much later. And then He would leave them again as He went back to the Father in heaven. He was preparing them for all this and more as they learned what it meant to follow Him.

But His words are meant for us as well if we look to Jesus as the way, the truth and the life. As we face the uncertainties of life in this broken world, we have the certain hope that this is not all there is – there is life beyond anything we can imagine in store for us. There is an end to our troubles and fears. And as we wait, we are not alone. The Father gives us the Holy Spirit to continue the work of Jesus in teaching us and helping us to understand God's truth. And, as we learn to trust Him, no matter what happens, His peace will guard our hearts and minds.

And when we experience the death of someone we love, as our brother Michael has done, we have the certain hope of life beyond the grave for those who are God's children. We know that they are with the Lord, and we will see them again. And in the meantime, as we grieve their departure and adjust to life without them, we can know God's presence through the Holy Spirit and God's peace in our hearts and minds. This doesn't necessarily lessen our grief or make it easy but it does give us hope, a certain hope based on the God who is faithful in His love and gracious in all He does.

