**Stowe Church Sunday November 1st 2020**

**Readings : Isaiah Chapter 25 vv 6 -9 and Revelation Chapter 21 vv1-6a**

I am often surprised how many times we see passages in Scripture where God is promising new things.

I will make a new covenant

I will give you a new name

I will give you a new heart

Think also of new birth, new life.

And then in our passage from Revelation 21, a new Jerusalem, a new heaven and a new earth and the climax :

**“I am making everything new “**

The two passages we have read this morning both point to “the new”. It’s interesting that Isaiah Chapter 24 is sometime headed “Humanity in crisis or humanity buckling “good description of where we are now. But this chapter is followed by Chapter 25 with the promise of a very different world climaxing with the words:

**“In that day they will say surely this is our God, we trusted in Him and He saved us. Let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation.”**

Revelation 21 picks up on that theme and gives a glorious picture of a new creation where

**“God will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death, or mourning, or crying or pain for the older things have passed away “**

These words have to be a great encouragement to us living in the covid 19 world where all we were certain about and trusted in have been shaken or destroyed, where we seem to be living in a permanent crisis

But what would those who are not interested in God or church or religion think of us finding these words being an encouragement.

Many would mock or ridicule us for clinging to some words from some “irrelevant old book”, looking for some kind of comfort blanket.

So it is important we don’t lose sight of why we can find comfort and put our trust in these promises of God. We need to go back to basics and allow those important promises to quieten any doubts we may have during these trying times and strengthen our faith. Paul in 1 Corinthians 13 stressed the importance of the God given virtues of faith, hope and love. Can these God given virtues help us have the confidence to stand firm whatever the world throws at us? ?

Firstly let us reflect on faith. It is important never to lose sight of the fact that our faith is based on a real person – Jesus.

Through his life, death and resurrection he has revealed God’s love, grace and salvation to us and opened the door for a new start as Paul explained:

**“Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.
The old things have passed away.
Behold, all things have become new.”
(2 Corinthians 5:17)**

We simply need to resolve to put Jesus first and honor him as the Lord of our lives; then with the help of the Spirit do our best each day to follow his example and teaching, to be faithful disciples. As we do that we will be transformed, as Paul puts it so clearly :

**“We are being transformed into his likeness with ever increasing glory which comes from the Lord who is the Spirit” ( 2Corinthians 3 verse 18)**

Putting Christ first also allows us to know that, beyond all else, we are children of God; that no matter what you’ve done or what others say about you, or what the world throws at you nothing will ever be able to separate you from the love of God in Jesus Christ. (Romans 8:38-39). Our place in God’s family is secure.

Keep this vision before you: you are a child of God, for whom Christ died, and your ultimate destiny is to be part of His eternal family.

And if Jesus, thanks to his atoning death and glorious resurrection, is the reason for our faith then the promise of our own resurrection is surely the basis of our hope.

In the light of this wonderful hope the trials of this life can be viewed from a different perspective. The focus shifts from the outward to the inward, from the temporary to the enduring, from the transient to the eternal.

Our hope is not superficial, wishing things will work out - I hope it will be a fine day – nor is our hope just being optimistic

Hope is both a confident expectation of eternal life in a new creation and the motivation to persevere in our faith journey

Someone once said it is by faith we find the path to life, through hope we are kept on it.

We can have that confidence because of what God has done in the past, particularly in preparing for the coming of Jesus, what he is doing now through His church and what He will do in bringing in His new creation.

 On the All Saints Day we recall the words in Hebrews Chapter 12 verse 1

**Therefore since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses let us throw everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles us and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.**

Back to those words from Revelation Chapter21 verse 5 “**Behold, I am making all things** **new.”** No matter how bad things are in the world around us – or even in our personal lives – God can heal, restore and bring peace into any situation if we do not lose sight of the where we are heading

**“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” ( Romans 15 verse 13 )**

Paul, when writing about faith hope and love, concludes the greatest of these is love.

In 1 John Chapter 4 vv 7 – 12 we read that God is love. Love is the very heart and nature of God .

We read In Deuteronomy Chapter 7 verse 8 that it was because God loved the Israelites that He brought them out of slavery.

And it was out of that same love that God sent His son to die on the cross, setting us free from the power (slavery) of sin and death and giving us a new life both now and in God’s new creation. It is only the love of God that truly offers a new beginning and brings about that reconciliation on which our hope is based. And as we wait for that new creation He calls us to trust in His love, as Psalm 145 reminds us **“ The Lord watches over all who love Him “**

God’s love is also about community whichwe can see in the Trinity; three persons yet one, a community of love. We have been created for relationship and community. Did not Jesus command us to love one another? We are not alone as we journey in faith and hope: we are part of God’s family, a family where love is its hallmark.

And it is worth reminding ourselves what Paul wrote in Romans Chapter 8 :

**“I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future nor any powers , neither height nor depth nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord”**

So as followers of Jesus we can ,with all the saints of the past, present and future, stand firm in our faith, have confidence in our hope and rest in the knowledge that nothing can separate from the love of God. We can therefore live our lives safe in the light of the assurance that Jesus will come again and there will be that new creation promised in Revelation Chapter 21 where God will wipe away every tear from our eyes and there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain for the old order of things has passed away.

So we join with the Psalmist ( Psalm 52) :

**“I trust in God’s unfailing love for ever and ever,**

**I will praise you for what you have done,**

**In your name I will hope, for your name is good**

**I will praise you in the presence of your saints.”**

**Amen**

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