

Transcript – Week 4 Message from Bishop Richard

Some years ago, I attended the funeral of a very gifted young man who died all too young of a very nasty but short illness. His family had a vibrant Christian faith and the funeral was a great celebration of resurrection hope in a packed church. His father even managed to sing during the ceremony. The reactions of fellow mourners afterwards were fascinating. A number of the Christians, whose faith was a little less sure, expressed a sort of envy that they didn't share the faith-filled certainty that was on display. Others, with no faith, found the service slightly disturbing. For them such displays of faith and hope, in the face of a tragic life cut short, seemed like a denial of grief and the awfulness of what happened. They wondered whether there was a greater pressure on the family to appear more cheerful than they felt because as church leaders they would somehow be letting people down if they weren't resolutely positive.

As we approach the remembrance of the Easter events all of these emotions are on display. There is despair and anger in the death of an innocent man. There is the waiting of Saturday, the remaining in the mystery of the moment, where all hope seems extinguished and grief and fear threaten to overwhelm us. Then there is the mysterious joy of Easter morning. Jesus is alive, but not merely resuscitated; resurrected. A whole new order of being is glimpsed; a future pregnant with possibility; eternity breaking into our time bound understanding. We can find our own situation in life at various points over the weekend

No-one preached resurrection faith with more passion than Paul, but for him hope didn't erase the struggles of life, it infused them with new meaning and significance. When he wrote to the church in Thessalonica, many of whom would have experienced the martyrdom of friends and lived with brutal persecution, he didn't say don't grieve, as if hope somehow made everything alright. He said don't grieve as those without hope. Hope doesn't extinguish our grieving, because grief is the price we pay for love, but it does put it in a bigger perspective.

The writer to the Hebrews lists the great heroes of faith in chapter 11. The list of privations they endured is gruesome. At the end of the list he says this, "they were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what was promised, since God has planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect." Christian hope is about far more than the improving of our current circumstances its about another world; an eternal world intersecting ours. We believe in eternity, but we're not so heavenly minded that we're no earthly good. The biblical vision of eternity is of heaven coming down to earth, of God working his purposes out in a broken and hurting world until a time when there is a new heaven and a new earth brought together. A fusion of the eternal and the temporal, where



God will wipe every tear from our eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.

Easter gives us a rich language to articulate our real experience. The language of lament and dereliction, uttered by Jesus on the cross. He quotes from that depository of all human emotion the psalms, so sanctifying them as a vehicle for our own grief, "my god, my god why have you forsaken me. There is the despair and disappointment of the disciples on the Emmaus road, "we had hoped." But there is ultimately the joyous declaration of Easter, Christ is risen. It was the hope that allowed Paul to declare, "for 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.

May this Easter fill grief with hope, despair with meaning, and give us faith filled endurance in this time of waiting and watching. May we experience the risen Christ with us; always.
Blessing.