

Aughnacloy, Ballymagrane, Clogherney & Sixmilecross Presbyterian Churches

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1 Corinthians 15:20-22. But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.

Dear Friends

As your minister, it is a great privilege that I have in bringing this weekly devotion to you. Our theme today, is the 'Resurrection Hope' we have in the second coming of Jesus.

I trust that you are all keeping safe and well. As we wait with expectant hope of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ as we reflect on the next portion: **1 Thessalonians 4:13-18** *Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. 14 We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. 15 According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. 16 For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord for ever. 18 Therefore encourage each other with these words.*

Prayer - *New every morning is the love, our waking and raising prove, through sleep and darkness safely brought, restore to life and power and thought. Prepare us Lord in your dear love, for perfect rest with you above, and help us, this and every day, to grow more like you we pray.*

Loving Lord, as we look to the future in your word today, we ask that in our hearts and minds we would embrace the future with renewed hope for the times to come as declared in your word. For in these days of social distance and lock-down, we often feel alone, may we know that reassurance of your presence all around us in our homes.

O God of the future, as we live in these uncertain times, we pray for those whose lives have been turned on their head by situations which have developed in our families in recent times. There are many who are unnerved by the effects of the COVID-19 virus too. Many people live their life, unsure of exactly what may come to pass.

As we look to you in these times, we see our future in a different light, as our deepest insecurities are surfacing, and a silence we find hard to bear gives us no place to hide. Yesterday's comfortable certainties have given way to today's paralysis and panic, tomorrow's great unknowns darken our horizon.

We grasp for something solid, to slow spinning minds, soothe storm tossed hearts. we have this hope, an anchor for our resurrection hope for our souls, found in Jesus, secured for us in heaven, able to steady the ship, sufficient to bear us to an eternal shore. Help us to know and grow in that hope, in our own lives. May we show it and sow it, as we move among others, that the world may rediscover safety, security, serenity in you. O Lord of hope, in this moment, fill us with all joy and peace, as we trust in you, that we may overflow with hope, by the power of the Holy Spirit revealed to us in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

We live in a society fascinated with the future, especially now in the short term as we attempt to navigate our way through exit from Lock-Down, life seems to be dominated by the 'what if the 'R' value rises'? How will society react and recover in the longer term?

However, the Bible gives us fully developed pictures of what's going to happen in the future. In our text today, God gives us a snapshot of what happens when Christians die, and what's going to happen when Jesus returns.

We will all face death, when friends and relatives die, and we will walk with them through that ordeal, but we will also face death ourselves, and we need to be prepared so that when that trial occurs.

As we trust Jesus as our Saviour, we believe that whether we live or die, Jesus is a good Lord. Death is a reminder of sin and weakness; we cannot avoid the pain and the suffering connected to it. People who do not believe in Jesus seek various ways of escaping grief and putting off the fact that one day that they too will die.

However, Christians can look death in the face and believe that there is hope. We can be confident that death will not have the last word.

Paul first of all highlights that the Christian Hope does not ignore pain and grief. Grief is part of life! God has created us with the capacity for relationships. So, when we lose a relationship to death, there will be intense grief. We must not give in to the stoicism that may surround us and deny us our emotions.

The struggle we have with grief is a reflection of the reality of loss in this sinful world. As we realise that grief is part of the struggle of this life in the face of death, we can grieve with a confident hope. Paul does not forbid that we should grieve. On the contrary, he acknowledges the grief and tells us to grieve with hope. Our Christian hope transforms the pain and the grief. Christian hope does not ignore grief!

Christian Hope is Grounded in Christ's Death and Resurrection! V14. *We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in Him.*

Here Paul is drawing a parallel between the death and the resurrection of Christ and the death and the resurrection of those who believe in Christ. First; Jesus died. Christians have fallen asleep. Second; Jesus rose again. God will bring those who believe with Jesus when He comes. These parallel points out our powerful union with Christ. If Jesus died and rose again, that will also happen to Christians who believe in Christ. Our hope is that we are united in Christ. Christ was raised, so we will also be raised from the dead. Our hope is focused on Christ's death and resurrection.

Christian Hope is Focused upon Christ's Presence! V15, focuses us on the very presence of Christ with us when He returns: *According to God's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep.* The original word used for 'coming' here is a term used also in Roman and Greek literature outside of the Bible designate the arrival of a dignitary. For example, the arrival of the Caesar on a visit. Therefore, Paul points to the importance surrounding this coming event.

A profound and significant truth is unfolded before us here in this verse which we cannot take for granted. Those who are alive at the coming of Jesus do not have an advantage over those who are dead. The hope that we have of the presence of those who have gone before us, comes from this verse. We will all have Christ's Presence!

Christian Hope is Consistent in Life or Death! Our hope does not change whether we are dead or alive. The same Hope is for us all, the Resurrection. Those who die are living with Jesus in what we often call Heaven. As far as we can tell from the Bible, heaven is a dimension of reality that is invisible to us right now.

When Christ returns, the old-world reality, which we are familiar with, will be ripped away, and the dimension of the new eternal reality will be revealed along with Christ's presence. At the return of Christ, we all receive new resurrected, glorified bodies. Whether we are alive or not at the time of Christ's return, is not the issue. For Jesus will bring with Him a completely new reality, bound up in the resurrection. Our hope is In Christ: - it does not ignore pain and grief. It is Grounded in Christ's Death and Resurrection! It is Focused upon Christ's Presence! It is Consistent in Life or Death!

Prayer: Loving Lord we thank you today for the love, comfort and encouragement you are to us all in these present times. When the fear of the unknown surrounds us we are reminded that you are with us in the midst of the tumbles of life. As we look to you, may your love for us be real in each of our lives, equipping us for the time that lies ahead, and may we look to the future and the return of Jesus with renewed faithfulness and diligences in these days.

Prepare us Lord in your dear love, for perfect rest with you above, and help us, this and every day, to grow more like you we pray.

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit rest remain and abide with us all, this day and forevermore. Amen.