**Reflection for Sunday 14th June 2020 – Peace and Hope**

May the words of my lips and the meditations of my heart be acceptable unto you, O Lord. Amen.

This morning I want to look at peace and hope in our Romans reading and consider what this has to do with our Matthew reading.

There is no doubt that life as we know it has changed with Coronavirus –

* Work patterns
* School - teachers, children and grandchildren
* Church
* Climate change
* Pace of life
* Spending more time at home, on your own or in family groups
* Government agendas have changed e.g. increasing use of public transport is no longer a priority

All of us have been affected in some way.

For some of us it has been a blessing to have more time, for others it has been a real challenge.

There have also been the demands of doing things differently. I have had to do all the studying for my last college module on-line. I have found it very challenging; it is not my preferred style of learning.

Other demands include doing church differently, gaining new skills and being willing to work together to be church.

“Since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God”.

It is because we are justified by faith, which we have explored in depth in our Bible study on Galatians, that we have peace.

Peace and hope.

We have just sung ‘my peace I give unto you, it’s a peace that the world cannot give, it’s a peace that the world cannot understand’.

The peace that Paul is referring to is not that feeling of peace that we sometimes have, where we are composed and feel that all is right with the world.

The peace that Paul is talking about is the peace that we have with God, not with the world.

For Christians peace is not a feeling but a fact.

We have a relationship with God because we believe, it is having that relationship which gives us peace.

Peace with God is a privilege and a blessing that we have because of what Jesus has done, not because of anything that we have done.

Peace and hope.

“We boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God”

Most of us do not like people who boast. People boast about what they have done in their own strength, it usually has an element of pride mixed with it.

Paul is talking about boasting about God, about how good he is and about what he has done for us in Jesus.

Other translations say we rejoice in our hope of sharing the glory of God. We have a future hope and we can both rejoice and boast in that.

Peace and hope.

Neither of these preclude suffering.

I see COVID 19 as the world war of our generation. It is going to have many of the impacts of previous world wars.

How can we share the message of peace and hope when all around us there is suffering?

* Over 41,000 deaths in the UK so far
* Poverty has been exacerbated for many people
* Black and Ethnic minority groups are hit harder
* Racial tension has exploded again over the death of George Floyd which has led to questions around history and how it is portrayed
* Domestic violence has increased
* Estate agents are busy because there have been so many relationship breakdowns during the lockdown

Covid 19 has caused very real suffering in many ways for many people.

But it has also:

* Brought communities together
* Allowed people to acknowledge their appreciation of our NHS
* Brought out the best in so many people who have worked to support others by getting prescriptions, shopping, cooking meals for key workers, etc.
* Forced people to do things differently, which in the long run may be better for us and the planet

We have peace with God and eternal hope.

In some ways the suffering has produced endurance, what my grandmother would have called the war-time spirit.

Paul is using well known Jewish virtues of endurance and character to show that being a Christian is not easy.

There is no doubt that COVID 19 has caused suffering, both visible and hidden suffering.

* People are suffering because of the lack of social contact
* People miss the close relationships and hugs and kisses of loved ones
* A number of those who have had COVID 19 are going to take time to recover- rehabilitation - Pip
* People have lost their jobs
* Businesses have collapsed
* Debt has increased

This is the post war legacy. How can we rejoice in that?

This does not look like peace and hope.

There is a prayer which says ‘God has not promised skies ever blue, flower strewn pathways always for you’

but it goes on to say that God has promised

* strength for the day
* rest for the labour
* light for the way
* grace for the trials
* help from above
* unfailing kindness
* undying love.

Romans 5:8 says God’s love has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit.

Poured, this gives a picture of abundance, it is not just a little bit but a huge quantity.

Jeremiah 29:11 says “For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope”.

We have peace with God and eternal hope.

We need to share the good news of that peace and hope.

There may be **a** peace once the virus is under control, but people still need the peace that only God can give.

Many people will also want to know, where is the hope?

Suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope.

All of us have suffered in some way in our lifetime, it will be different for different people. My mother died when I was 12, life is never easy, but God uses suffering if we let Him.

How can the church get alongside those who are suffering now to share this peace and hope? In our Matthew reading

* Jesus went around proclaiming the good news and told the disciples to do the same – we are called to share the good news of peace and hope
* He healed every disease and sickness
* He had compassion
* Jesus recognised their need for a shepherd
* He tasked the disciples to ask God for labourers to send out – we need to pray and be prepared to go.
* Jesus gave the disciples authority - delegation and shared leadership
* Jesus tasked them first with going to their own people

In the light of this model now is the time for the us, as Jesus’ disciples today, to be looking at:

* Different ways of sharing the good news
* How we can meet people where they are, in Bible study I asked people to think about their gifts and talents
* How we can get alongside people and help them to heal and move forwards
* How we can share Jesus compassion
* How we can provide leadership for those who are lost
* How we can work together, with local organisations and with other Christians
* How we can exercise our authority in Jesus
* How we can better reach our local communities

That is what peace and hope looks like.

In John 14:27 Jesus says “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give as the world gives”.

Matthew 5:9 says “blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.”

If we plan now then we can make the most of opportunities once we get back into our local communities.

People talk about “when we get back to normal,” but I hope that there is going to be a new normal, one that harnesses the benefits of what we have learned and one that, through each one of us, gives more people peace and hope for the future.

Amen.