

Sunday, March 21, 2021 Jeremiah 31: 31-34 Hebrews 5:5-10 John 12:20-33

Covenants and Commitments:
“Covenant of Hope: Seeds of Hope”

In small towns and cities across Ontario there are smiles on the faces of people. We cannot see these smiles because everyone is wearing a mask to protect themselves and others, but behind the mask there is a feeling of anxiety and excitement. They are receiving the vaccine for the virus which was just circling the globe one year ago. Lockdowns were normal in many countries and what is occurring these days are telephone appointments and people supporting the health units across the province to get everyone vaccinated by one type or another. There is hope that one day we will be able to meet and greet each other fully without the risk of sharing a virus which has proven to lead to the death of many people worldwide. But there is hope. But what is this hope? And from where does hope itself come from?

Hope is the confident expectation of what God has promised and its strength is in His faithfulness. Hope is a firm assurance regarding things that are unclear and unknown and is a fundamental component of the life of the righteous. For life to have meaning there must be hope. But God will help those who put their hope in him. They will not be confounded, put to shame, or disappointed. The righteous, who have this trustful hope in God, have a general confidence in God's protection and help and are free from fear and anxiety. We must then ask, who are the righteous who trust in God? What does it mean to be righteous and to have hope even in these days of uncertainty when we do not know what each day brings with sickness, death and world events leading to celebration or strife, joy or grief and even revelation and wonder! But there is one thing that is foundational to our relationship with God is that we must have faith in Him and this faith is founded on His ability to transform us and others through the Spirit.

Throughout Lent we have been looking at the covenants God made with people. Noah- the rainbow was put in place and God made the covenant never to destroy the earth with floods. With Abram and Sarai, God made the covenant that they would be the ancestors of many generations of people. Even though they were older having Isaac it was the beginning of God's covenant with them as they kept their faith strong through their lives. As Moses shared the commandments with the Hebrew people making their way to the promised Land God entered into covenant by teaching them what they could and could not do. And even though they disobeyed God and God sent snakes, He still offered a way for healing- for people to look up to the bronze serpent and be healed. These are covenants God made with people through

generations. The covenant read from Jeremiah speaks of the people's knowledge of God and God's capabilities. The covenant states, "I will put my law within them and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God and they will be my people. No longer shall they teach one another or say to one another, 'Know God; for they shall all know me; for I will forgive their iniquity and remember their sin no more.'" God's laws are placed within His people and the people know them. They will fully follow God's way and they will live full and abundant lives. And if they falter, they are forgiven.

This is a wonderful statement of love from God to all His people. Unfortunately, if we look at the world around us today, there are many thousands of people who do not know God's laws or of this covenant of putting God first. So what does this mean for us today as we seek to live and obey God's words for faithful living? It means telling others of the joy and wonder of Christ's passion and love for us all. It means putting our faith in front of others and standing up for what is right and good in Jesus' name.

Jesus is God's Son and as we listened to the passages from Hebrews 5 and John 12 we must realize that their connection is through Jesus' purpose on earth. He came to earth to teach, to love and then to die in order to rise again for the sake of others. Jesus was born human in order to fully understand life on earth- with its stresses, work, losses, celebrations and tough times. As a Jewish man he realized that his oppressors were not only the Roman rulers. They were also those who lead the established faith without knowledge of the need for a Messiah who would save them and that everyone needed spiritual rebirth. It is the writer of Hebrews who describes Jesus as the high priest who became the source of eternal salvation for all who would obey him. Jesus prayed to God seeking that he would not have to die but he obeyed and suffered on the cross until death. Yet this was not the end—through his resurrection Jesus is the Source of eternal salvation for all who obey and believe. It is through Jesus we have hope beyond death, beyond this life and this is when we will experience God's glory as those who have gone before us.

But where does hope originate in God's creation? According to John 12, Jesus was being sought out by Greek people who had asked Philip and Andrew about him. Jesus' story was now being shared amongst many people in Jerusalem and his purpose of saving those in need spread quickly. Jesus knew that it would be soon time for his death and to illustrate this he described a grain of wheat which falls into the earth and dies, if it remains just a single grain. But if it die it also bears much fruit. The seed that dies will rise.

The covenant of hope enables us to plant seeds of all kinds—and with the right amount of sunshine, water and warmth the seed germinates and eventually produces more seeds like it once was. God loved the world so much that he sent Jesus for people to believe in and follow so that they would receive the gift and hope of eternal life. God's plan for his people is that they would become like Christ. In this example, Jesus is speaking of both himself and his followers. Jesus is like that one grain of wheat and in order to "produce many seeds," he must die. He must transform into what seed is destined to become. That is, in the case of wheat, a plant with many seeds. But in this transformation period between one grain, to a plant which has many seeds- death must occur. And with many seeds there is a release of the old to the acquisition of the new—the seed loses its shell enabling new parts to grow and become the plant itself.

As we continue to walk with Jesus this Lent, we need to hold onto the words of Christ as his Passion story unfolds and his death draws closer. As we anticipate Palm Sunday, we must also remember Good Friday follows. But there is hope in Christ Jesus. There is hope beyond the tomb and there is new life made possible because of Christ. This is God's covenant of hope. To see you through life, death and eternal life- in others and for you. This is the gift of covenant God calls you to be a part of. But you must know the law of God, and be reminded that you are God's child in faith and through your believing you can have hope beyond all expectations. For this is Jesus. He is the source of eternal salvation for he was obedient to God and was made perfect for us. In Christ alone, our hope is found. He is our light, our strength our song. Jesus is our All in All and asks us to remember his Passion is for our sake.

Let us pray: God of grace and love, we thank you for Jesus. He is the seed that dies to rise again for our sake. Help us to enter again your covenant of hope as we prepare to walk with Christ in Holy Week and to experience the wonder of his love for us all. Hear now the prayers of our hearts SILENCE. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.