

## **Jesus Christ, Our Hope**

**Luke 18: 35-43 and 1 Peter 1:3-6**

Good Morning to you church family and to those of you joining us online. As has been said, it's World Anabaptist Fellowship Sunday. It's a chance for us a family of believers to remember out sisters and brothers worshiping across the globe and to be remember out place in the tapestry that is Anabaptism around the world

To open today, I thought I'd take on a short historical tour of Anabaptism- complete with slides!

So, most people consider the birth of Anabaptism to have happened on January 21st, 1525. This is the day that Conrad Grebel baptized George Blaurock in Felix Manz's house in Zurich, Switzerland. Mr Blaurock went on to baptize several more people shortly after his own baptism.

Ana-Baptism literally means Re-Baptism, baptizing again. So when people were called Anabaptists they were being called Rebaptizers. In the 1500s, the Catholic Church was the dominant church in Europe, and, of course, practiced the baptizing of infants.

Through studying the scriptures on their own, the early Anabaptist fore-mothers and fathers came to the conclusion that baptism is for those who can make an intentional, conscious choice about following Jesus and living in God's ways, something an infant

could not do. So, in defiance to the Catholic Church, they baptized one another, thus the term re-baptism. Interestingly, the early Anabaptists balked at this term because in their minds they were being truly Baptized for the first time. But the name stuck around, and here we are. Today, Anabaptist is an accepted English term for all Reformation groups who practiced believers (rather than infant) baptism, and the denominations descended from them such as the Amish, Mennonites, and Hutterites.

As the Anabaptist movement grew and developed, they became known for a few key points of identity. They defined themselves as faithful, Biblebelieving Christians. They set themselves as peaceful, law-abiding, nonresistant Christians. This came from early conflicts within Anabaptism when more radical members of the group proposed social change through violent means. Finally, Anabaptist defended the public, and visible nature of the church in the world.

One of the early Anabaptist Leaders and Theologians was this guy, Menno Simon. His leadership in the Netherlands and North Germany in the 1540s helped to form a stream of Anabaptism called "Mennonites". In honor of Menno, I considered titling my sermon after one of his early writings on Christian Hope called, "The New Creature: A Fair and Fundamental Instruction from the Word of the Lord, Urgently Admonishing all Men Who Call Themselves Christians to Seek the Heavenly Birth and the New Creature, Without Which No Man Who has Come to Years of Understanding Is or Can Be a True Christian". Catchy, right? In the end, I settled on "Jesus Christ, Our Hope."

So let's talk today about Christian Hope and what it means. In the faith tradition that I grew up in, Christian Hope, of the Hope of Jesus as it were, mostly boiled down to the promise of eternal life. Hope meant that when I died, I would go to heaven to be with Jesus. Which is a beautiful promise which is grounded in scripture -Jesus declared that sin and death are both real problems for humanity and he came to solve that problem for us. Romans 6:20-23, "When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the obligation to do right. **And** what was the result? You are now ashamed of the things you used to do, things that end in eternal doom. **But** now you are free from the power of sin and have become slaves of God. Now you do those things that lead to holiness and result in eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord."

Jesus promises us that we will be at home, safe with Jesus when we leave this earth. "Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God]; believe also in me. My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me so that you also may be where I am. "

Eternal life is a real promise, and a source of hope for followers of Jesus. In some faith traditions, this future hope promise becomes the only reason to hope. The future hope gets placed at the center of the good news, and can end up being dismissive of this current reality. We can hear this problematic theology in phrases like, "I'm one day closer to Jesus!" or the old hymn, "This world is not my home, I'm just a-passing

through, my treasures are laid up, somewhere beyond the blue.” Because...if we’re just passing through, if this life is just something to grin and bear, then why would we care about creation and the impact of climate change? Why would hunger, or sickness or war that people experience be of any consequence to us so long as their soul is saved? The problem is not that we don’t have the “hope of heaven” because scripture says that we absolutely do. The problem is this isn’t the ONLY reason for Christian hope, this isn’t the ONLY reason why Jesus came. Jesus came to offer us a LIVING Hope, as it says in the 1st Peter passage that Carrol read for us this morning. Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.”

I love that Jesus is described as the Living Hope. Not a false hope. Not a hope that is dying, crumbling, past it’s best before date. This is a hope that is longed for, anticipated. A hope that has come from pain, labor, and promise. A hope that reorients life with its first roaring cry. A hope that gets wrapped up warmly, held close and smothered in tears and joy. A new life. A living hope. This hope is dynamic, active, ALIVE, so how could this hope be for only after our earthly bodies are no more?

Jesus’ ministry reminds us that he cares just as much about our lives, our needs, our pains on this side of eternity. “ As Jesus approached Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging. When he heard the crowd going by, he asked what was happening. They told him, “Jesus of Nazareth is passing by.”He called out, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” Those who led the way rebuked him and told him to be

quiet, but he shouted all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" Jesus stopped and ordered the man to be brought to him. When he came near, Jesus asked him, "What do you want me to do for you?" "Lord, I want to see," he replied. Jesus said to him, "Receive your sight; your faith has healed you." Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus, praising God. When all the people saw it, they also praised God."

The stories of miraculous healing, of Jesus reaching outwards the sick, the needy, the forgotten and the vulnerable are all over the Gospels. If Jesus came only to save our souls, why would he have cared about our bodies? Why would healing, physical, emotional and spiritual healing play such a central role in his ministry?

It's clear that the Hope which Jesus brings is hope for yesterday, today, and forever.

One of the very real challenges for People of Faith, and maybe most especially Mennonites in Canada is to work and walk RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE, safely hemmed in by "both hopes" that Jesus offers. The temptation can be to fall "too far" into one hope over the other. If we overemphasize the spiritual redemption and eternal life brought by Jesus than our faith becomes only about winning souls, it can become defeated or disengaged in the real needs of people around us. Needs that Jesus himself tended to in his ministry. One the other had, if we reduce the good news of Jesus to a purely social gospel, one focused entirely on righting what we consider to be wrong with the world, than we've set ourselves up a judge and jury, set ourselves up as a kind of savior, when really, our Savior has already come. We need an integrated, embodied

Hope, hope with a capital H. Faith produces hope which produces action- this Integrated Gospel of Faith and Deeds is at the heart of the Anabaptist Understanding.

There are times, though, when the most embodied, integrated Hope will bump up against something that feels immovable, impossible to hold on hope through. Maybe it's the diagnosis of a chronic illness. The war in Ukraine. When a greatest hope or desire goes unfulfilled. The last thing anyone would want to hear is, "Remember that your hope is in Jesus!" Yes, that's true, but what happens when that doesn't feel true? What happens when the here and now feels hopeless and the future hope feels light years away? What does hope in Jesus offer us then?

For a response to that question, I'd like to offer up one of the testimonies shared by Mennonite World Conference from Africa.

It reads, "When we receive the life of Jesus, a living hope is born in us, with our desires turned toward what does not perish: eternal life with God. This new life is constantly being tested in various ways. This is the story of a young Fula (a person from the semi-nomadic Fulbe people) from Burkina Faso who converted from Islam to Christianity.

This happened at the start of terrorism in a Fulbe village in northern Burkina Faso. The muezzin (the person who calls people to prayer) of the mosque gave his life to Jesus to

obtain salvation. The imam and all the Muslim community were not happy with his decision. They accused him of treason.

One day, the imam summoned the muezzin before several Muslim followers. He was placed in the middle of the circle, and the imam asked the audience, "If one of your oxen gets lost from the herd, and you find it, what do you do?" The Muslim faithful answered firmly, "we bring him back and we tie him well so that he does not get lost again."

The new convert asked for the floor to give the answer he had in his heart. "In my humble opinion, if your ox goes astray and you find it in a green pasture grazing fresh grass, you leave it there, and with a happy heart you go to lead the rest of the herd to him so that all your oxen may also benefit from this green pasture."

The imam and his retinue became angry and withdrew.

A few days later, unidentified gunmen broke into the new believer's home in the night. Because of the heat, he and his family slept in the yard outside the house on mats. The attackers kicked him awake and ordered him to follow them. He obeyed without flinching. As they moved through the dark night, one of the attackers fired a shotgun at him but did not hit him.

In a spirit of survival, the new believer fled and hid in a friend's kitchen until dawn.

Sensing the danger had passed, he came out of his hiding place and showed himself to

his friend. The friend went home discreetly to check if his family was well, and to bring him some clothes. The new believer left the village to save his life.

Jesus is our hope: even if we go through the valley of the shadow of death, he is by our side.”

In those times of trial, heartbreak or despair, Jesus offers us a by-our-side hope. A hope that says you are not alone, I will never leave you nor forsake you. I AM WITH YOU. I am by your side. This too, is part of the hope that Jesus gives us.

On Tuesday evening, in the car on the way home from gymnastics, Junia said, “Sometimes I ask for God’s help and God doesn’t do it.” What follower of Jesus hasn’t felt the sting on a seemingly unanswered prayer? This testimony that I just read was fresh on my mind, so we had a good talk, about how that does happen, and it hurts and it’s really, really hard, but God promises to always be with us, by our side to help us not to feel alone in the hard things.” I’m grateful that this testimony from one of our Anabaptist Family members could inform a conversation with my daughter. We have much to learn from one another.

So Friends, Jesus Christ is our hope. Our hope for our everyday - waking up, garden tending, meal eating, friend hugging, sinking into the pillows everyday life. He is our hope for eternity, for the promise of a life everlasting, safe in the arms of Jesus. And he is by our side, sustaining, guiding, upholding hope. Let’s lift our voices and lives this



week, with the whole global family of faith, to praise God for Jesus, Our Living Hope.

Amen.