

Vicar's Letter #6: 24 April, 2020

Signs of hope

Dear Parishioners

One of my favourite modern hymns is "Every Day", written by Shirley Murray. The third verse has the words:

Every day I will take your word,
answer your compassion's claim,
celebrate every sign of hope,
every deed done in your name....

As "people of the resurrection" we are called to be people of hope. Our hope is based on God "who is stronger than all kinds of death" (ANZPB p. 537), a God who is always with us and who is "making all things new" (Revelation 21:5).

One thing we can do as people of hope is to notice and celebrate the signs of hope around us. This does not mean that we forget about the suffering around us. Far from it! But even in the midst of grief and loss as we are, acknowledging the damage done to lives and livelihoods through the pandemic, we can still celebrate the good things that are happening amongst and around us. Particularly, this week, we can celebrate the good news that we expect to move out of the current Level 4 lockdown to Alert Level 3 this coming Tuesday.

There have been clear signs of hope in our parish during the lockdown, chiefly the small groups and the number of people attending them. Some of what we have shared in the groups has been moving and unforgettable. Many of us have felt strengthened in our Christian walk and witness at this unique and distressing time. Participation in a small group has allowed us not just to remain connected with others, but even to deepen our relationships with God and one another.

Another sign of hope I see is the way that most people in our society seem to have responded well to the Prime Minister's urging to "be kind" to one another, and to act for the good of all by responsibly staying in their bubble. In our world we certainly cannot take it for granted that people will act with compassion and common sense! It seems to me that this widespread humanity and decency in our country is very precious. And again it is a precious, hopeful thing that we are able to contribute to the support of others who are facing real difficulties at the moment by praying for them and reaching out to them in a range of practical ways.

With all of this in mind I invite you to share with others in the parish this Sunday from 3.30pm - 4.30pm. We will get together by Zoom (click this link: <https://anglicanchurch-nz.zoom.us/j/94432075722> or follow the details in this week's Newslink). Our "All in church" gathering will be an opportunity to catch up, reflect, pray, and give thanks for some really positive and hopeful things that have been happening, even at this troubling time.

Finally, I have been reflecting on one other thing, which has a hopeful aspect. In the middle of the pain and suffering of this pandemic it is increasingly clear that human beings cannot guarantee our own lives or livelihoods, although we have sometimes acted as if we could do or fix anything we wanted. Now it is very clear that we need to make wise choices for ourselves and for our planet or suffer the consequences. Perhaps our current situation will give humanity a much needed "wake-up call" to a wiser and more humble way of life in which we care for others and our environment a great deal better than we have done up till now. We so deeply need a collective change of heart about how we live on this planet, and

the pandemic could be the challenge that leads us to think again and brings us to a more measured and sustainable way of living.

Even in the most challenging of circumstances it is good for us, as people of faith, to look for signs of hope - signs of God's loving presence and wisdom in our lives. By doing this we bear witness to the resurrection of Jesus, and to God's power to bring life even out of death.

With my warm greetings in Christ.

Peter Bengel
(Vicar)