

Kingdom Come

Series: Following Jesus: Studies in Mark's Gospel

Date: 17 April 2022; Easter Day

Location: St George's, Battery Point

Texts: Mark 14:40-16:8; 1 Corinthians 15:14-26

Hope

This morning I want to talk about Hope. In the discussion group I run called Deeper Conversations, we've been reading *Making Sense of God*, by Tim Keller. The chapter we're up to is called, "A Hope that can face anything". Keller cites a book, *History of the Idea of Progress*, which shows how the older Christian idea of the coming kingdom of God has been secularised into the story of Progress or Reason and Freedom, or Civilisation or Human Rights.¹ But this story is beginning to crumble. Climate Change, Political polarisation, the pandemic, the war in Ukraine. What reasons do they give for optimism? The high rates of anxiety and depression among our young people, who should be most hopeful, suggests we are culturally facing a loss of hope. The things we've put our hope in have been unworthy of that trust.

And yet we need hope to survive. We need a hope that is personal and yet at the same time global. Not a shallow or vague hope that somehow everything will be ok, but a concrete and solid hope that one day there will be justice, that one day things will be put right, that what is broken will be made whole, a hope that can endure, and enable us to endure in the face of the worst in this world. Today of all days is a day to talk about hope because we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. The resurrection in a modern scientific age seems implausible, even fanciful, a wishful thinking. And we will touch on those objections later, although let me just say that I've printed some copies of an terrific article, "[Can we believe in the resurrection](#)", by one of the leading experts on Jesus' resurrection, published by the ABC a few years ago. Feel free to take one after the service. But for the moment, I wanted to focus on the meaning of Jesus' resurrection.

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Jesus' resurrection is the lynchpin of the Christian faith. We heard St Paul's words earlier:

If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.²

For the past few months we've been studying Mark's gospel at St George's. And everyone is probably sick of me saying this, but we've looked at 3 key themes. Who is Jesus? What is the Kingdom of God? And how can we follow Jesus? If you've read Mark's account of Jesus'

¹ Tim Keller, *Making Sense of God*, Hodder & Stoughton, 2016: 154-156

² 1 Corinthians 15.19

suffering and death, you'll know that he makes it clear that Jesus is the King. He is the Messiah, the Christ, the king of God's kingdom, through whom God reigns. As Jesus is crowned with thorns, and the cross is his throne, so with the words of the angel, "He is risen! He is not here," his kingdom begins to break into the world. What does it mean for this kingdom to come? At least these 4 things. Justice and peace. New Creation. The Defeat of Death. Union with God.

The prophet Isaiah saw that it would be a kingdom of justice and peace. He names the one to come as,

Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God,
 Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
 Of the greatness of his government and peace
 there will be no end.
 He will reign on David's throne
 and over his kingdom,
 establishing and upholding it
 with justice and righteousness
 from that time on and forever.³

Justice and peace is what we hope for when we look at Ukraine and Yemen. St Paul tells us in Acts that God has set a day when he will judge the world with justice. And he has given proof by raising Christ from the dead.⁴ In the face of our failing attempts, Jesus' resurrection is the promise and guarantee that one day there will be complete justice and everlasting peace.

Second, Jesus' resurrection is the dawn of the new creation. This too is what it means for the kingdom to come. Again, we read these words in the prophet Isaiah,

See, I will create
 new heavens and a new earth.
 The former things will not be remembered,
 nor will they come to mind.⁵

That day the wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat.⁶

The Bible closes with a vision of that day, where God himself "will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things

³ Isaiah 9.6-7

⁴ Acts 17.31

⁵ Isaiah 65.17

⁶ Isaiah 11.6

has passed away.”⁷ Mark signals this when he says that it is on the first day of the week the women come to the empty tomb. This is the first day of the new creation.

Third, the coming kingdom means the defeat of death itself. Jesus’ own resurrection is his conquest of death and a victory that all who belong to him will one day share. It is the dawn of the coming kingdom breaking into a world bound in darkness and death. This is the main thrust of our reading from 1 Corinthians 15. There Paul uses the picture of the firstfruits to describe Jesus’ resurrection. The first fruits are the promise that the rest of the harvest is coming and they give you a taste of what that harvest will be like.

But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. **21** For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. **22** For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. **23** But each in turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him.

And then Paul links the resurrection to the kingdom.

24 Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. **25** For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. **26** The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

This is solid, flesh and blood, hope in the face of death. We try to hide from death, deny its reality through cosmetics and surgery and praising the young and shifting the old out of sight. All because we are in fact terrified. Carl Jung said,

Death is indeed a fearful piece of brutality: there is no sense pretending otherwise. It is brutal not only as a physical event, but far more psychically: a human being is torn away from us and what remains is the icy stillness of death. There no longer exists any hope of a relationship, for all the bridges have been smashed at one blow.⁸

Jesus’ resurrection breaks the power of death and gives us hope in the face of its icy finger.

Fourth the coming kingdom means the bliss of union with God himself. Again from Revelation,

Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them.

They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.⁹

Jesus is our champion who has descended into death itself and come up victorious. He has entered into the fullness of life in the bosom of the Father. He will bring those who trust in him to the Father’s side as surely as he himself is risen.

⁷ Revelation 21.4

⁸ Quoted in *Making Sense of God*, pp162-3

⁹ Revelation 21.3

Trembling and Bewildered.

I've tried to paint some of the richness of the coming kingdom, signalled and guaranteed by Jesus' resurrection. Justice and Peace. The New Creation. The Defeat of Death. Union with God. But we find ourselves I think more often with Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Salome. They come to the empty tomb and hear the angel say,

Don't be alarmed," he said. "You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. **7** But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.'"

Mark finishes his Gospel in the most abrupt and peculiar fashion. We don't even get to see the risen Jesus.

8 Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.

It is so abrupt that later Christians thought it was unfinished and so there are a number of alternative endings that were added on that appear in the ancient manuscripts. Of course the other Gospels record the women and others meeting the risen Christ. But I think Mark's ending is an invitation for you and for me to enter into his story and make it our own. We live in the paradox of the cross and resurrection. We are in the midst of suffering and death, and yet we have the promise of the empty tomb. Jesus' resurrection is the light breaking into our world, and yet we cannot see it. On human terms, the terms of our closed world, where matter is all there is, we cannot grasp it. We are bewildered and perhaps afraid. Jesus' resurrection breaks our idols. It ruptures our certainties and our categories. It shatters our false belief that we are in control, that deals can be done with God, that we can shape him to our plans and purposes. It is beyond us and what we can do. It says we need God, because true hope is not in what we have, but in what we do not yet have. Hope is for what is impossible. And yet, with God all things are possible, even raising the dead. We can have hope then, only as we trust in the risen Lord.

Jesus' first words in Mark's Gospel are,

The time has come. The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news.

His resurrection is the light of the kingdom breaking into our darkness, in real time and space. That is the good news. That is our only hope. You and I find ourselves trembling and bewildered. Will you trust and entrust yourself to the risen King and so find hope?