

**Date:** 29<sup>th</sup> May 2011

**Sermon:** Rev Dr André Groenewald

**Reading:** 1 Peter 3:13-22

### **Background to the reading**

Our reading can be summed up by one sentence namely "To have hope despite suffering" .

The author starts by saying that no one can do the early Christians harm when they do good. It is possible to overpower the ungodly with the good because the goodness is grounded in the Gospel. But when they are persecuted for doing good, they must see it as a blessing because Jesus promised in Matthew 5:10. "Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

The author then quotes Isaiah 8 verses 12 and 13 to emphasize the point that they must only fear God! They must not fear any human being. The author is possibly talking of the struggle and the suffering they had to endure because they were Christians. The fear will go away when they trust God alone. But they must always be ready to show others the hope they share in the resurrection of Christ. When people do ask them they must be willing to share and explain where this hope is coming from. They must be able to respond in a non- threatening and a non- judgmental way to everyone that asks. In the end they will, through their gentleness and mercy, be able to convince those who do not share the same hope they have in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In the end those who slander them will be ashamed and possibly come to faith.

Their suffering must be seen in relation to the suffering of Jesus. His suffering was enough to overcome the distance between God and humanity and to redeem the sins of humanity. He also suffered while He was innocent and righteous. His suffering lead him to die but He was resurrected by God's Spirit. After He was resurrected He went to the "spirits in prison". Judaism believed that when people die they are imprisoned or trapped in "Hades" the underworld. Then, according to a commonly known Jewish tradition, Enoch was sent to proclaim God's judgment to them. Now in our reading Christ is the proclaimer of triumph over them.

Those spirits in prison are those who did not believe Noah and died because of their unfaithfulness.

The author then makes a natural transition to talk about baptism in verse 21 through the previous reference to Noah. The waters of baptism bring the new believers into a new relationship with God while the waters of the flood symbolised the sin and

unfaithfulness of the people. While the waters of the flood destroyed people, the waters of baptism bring people into the right relationship with God.

Jesus Christ overpowered all the authorities on His way to heaven— even all those who oppose God!

The message to the new Christians: Have faith and hope in God despite all the hardship and suffering! God is in charge and knows what is going on! Nothing can separate the believer from God – not even the evil and dark forces of this world!

Amen

## **Sermon**

The text verse for the sermon:

*<sup>15</sup> But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect...*

We - everyone that has faith - received so much from God. We received His full pardon. We received the living hope that we will not die, but live in all eternity with God through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. But to understand and to explain hope can sometimes be very difficult....

There is an Afrikaans song that tells the story of a mother who lost her son. She urges her boy's best friend to catch the sun for her because she wants to hang the sun in her late son's bedroom because it so dark in his room even in the middle of the day. She also adds how dark and quiet the corridor of her house is, even in the smallest corners. She wants the sun to be in the corridor, singing removing the silence! She exclaims her unbelief that the sun was now gone and could disappear just like that. She asks for understanding because her summer just faded away. She begs him to bring the sun to her because there is a place in her heart where the sun can stay because her heart is empty and dark.

I guess that is how we often feel when our loved ones die and we are left all on our own. We feel desolate, alone and in desperate need of some warmth and comfort. We feel as if the sun has stopped shining and as if nothing will be the same again. Yes we all experience that heartache that does not go away – even after years of parting and loss.

But our reading urges us to have hope. Is it really so easy?

I do not think so because we are humans. We often get mad at God and try to reason with him. We often look up into the sky and demand answers while in the

process of looking up we are blinded by the sun. No one can look straight into the sun without wearing proper sunglasses.

I heard once of this woman whose young boy had bone cancer. One day as she was sitting in the consultant's waiting room and as she watched other children who were also suffering the severity of cancer, she could not take it anymore. She walked outside and was very angry at God. She looked up towards God to protest, but found out she was blinded by the sun. Then she realised - that she cannot look into the sun without being blinded by it! She realised that the same is true of getting straight answers from God.

She understood that despite the fact that her boy and others were suffering, God was still in control. She understood that everything is in his hands. She realised that she had to find out what God wanted her to do in her current circumstances. Well she wrote a book helping millions of others to understand their faith in circumstances of suffering and hardship. With every letter she wrote, she brought a spark of hope!

Hope can be like the sun. Everyone is cheery whenever the sun is shining. Hope can bring life just like sun can light the darkest room or corner. Sometimes you and I must indeed bring this ray of hope to everyone that is not familiar with it. You and I must carry this hope that we have in the resurrection of Jesus as a precious diamond wherever we go. We must never ever let anyone rob us of the surety of our faith in the risen Lord Jesus.

We must be sun catchers to other people who need hope and there are many in our world this morning who feel desolate, alone, sad and depressed. And if you are here this morning because of your current circumstances that are hard and difficult, please turn to God. He is here!

If you are searching for God and you feel that He is not in your heart, please close your eyes now and just feel his presence around you. If you are mourning and cannot get over it, please touch someone next to you. They will know what to do. They will put their arms around you and hold you just as God is still doing although you do not realise it!

If you are so sad and cannot even cry – God will reach you in the deepest corners of your heart, because nothing is impossible to Him.

May we all share the hope of God's mercy everywhere we go and may we give the people around us something that cannot be bought in any store!

Amen