

Dear Friends,

What it means to have faith and trust in God in the midst of a pandemic is a question I often wrestle with. It's one I am often asked about as well. So it's been on my mind and I thought I'd risk simply writing down some of my thoughts this week. Hopefully you'll find it helpful and challenging.

The first is that God is sovereign and in control and working his plans and purposes out in the world. I have found preparing a sermon on revelation 4, which is a vision of the throne room in heaven very helpful. We may have a sense that things are dark and chaotic, however we need to raise our eyes and see the greatness of God. Viruses along with all other natural things are created, God is the creator.

I am helped by the immanence of God, that God is with us, Jesus words in Matthew 28 as he sends his followers out to make disciples is 'and lo (sorry I'm old enough to sometimes thing in king James English) I am with you to the end of the age'. In my scripture reading in Job today I was reminded of that God spoke to Job out of the storm.

Also we can have faith and trust in God because of his prevenient grace, another word is God's providence, not only does God create the world he sustains it. That is manifest in many practical ways.

Firstly, God has made the human body with all its abilities to fight off virus' etc. We can live trusting God by living a healthy life style. How we eat, exercise, our life balance, health supplements etc. Now one look at me and you know this is an area I struggle with. This year I am challenged and inspired with the fact that Lorne has bought an e-bike and comes to work on it each day.

Secondly, God has gifted humanity with such wisdom and understanding that we are able to do all the wonderful things which we call science. That is a gift from God, it comes from humanity being made in the image of God. So for me things like vaccines and medicine are ways God has provided for us. As a diabetic insulin is one of those things. One of my most vivid childhood memories is of having the English Measles. Having a high fever, lying in bed as the ceiling in my room seemed to come down and then spring back up and out to a great distance. The MMR vaccine our children had helped to make that a non-endemic illness in New Zealand. Likewise understanding how viruses are transmitted etc and treatments that are available for the symptoms of an infection, while not an exact science, helps us as a community and country. Science and medicine is not perfect however, We do need to see medicine and science as a gift from God, the challenge is that others see it as making us God like.

Thirdly, government, yes government. Hopefully good government, people who are able in the midst of things like the pandemic to enact public health regulations that are going to be as effective as possible in keeping the population safe. In fact a quick read through the Old Testament law will show you that public health regulations have been around for a very long time. Israel as a people who lived in tents in the wilderness and later together as a nation needed regulations to keep themselves safe from disease and epidemics. Now it does not mean I agree with everything that a government regulates, and I find myself really perplexed and upset with some of the mandates at the moment. But government is one of God's prevenient graces.

Then prayer and trust in God also become very important. That faith element, alongside the other things. My trust in God however does not mean that I am not going to be cautious with how I go about expressing that faith publically (ie with public worship). It's interesting I've read some articles recently that have quoted works that looked at the 1918 flu pandemic. What we are facing now and

how we have dealt with it are not that different. The church's stopped meeting face to face in many places, to stop the possibility of transmission. In the mid-west of the US, newspapers, the mass media of the day, printed sermons and prayers and hymns for people to stay connected and to worship together in their homes. On the other hand, in one Spanish town the catholic bishop decided that the people needed to get together and pray. They did it in a very 'Old School' catholic way with kissing relics and stuff, while his people admired his faith the death rate in the town from the flu was the highest in the country.

The last thing, sorry this is so long, is that while I find myself focused on the pandemic much of the time, it is to once again lift my sight and look at God's calling and mission in the midst of what is going on. To be prepared to keep on doing what God has called me, and us as a church to do and be. To plan for ministry, mission and growth, work at caring for people, and continuing to faithfully preach and proclaim God's word. To live faithfully.

Now that really only scratches the surface, I hope it helps with your reflections on the topic. I am always happy to get feedback and to discuss things raised in these pastoral emails.

Here are the notices.

Sunday Worship February 13th

This Sunday we have services at all three of our sites. We continue with the second part of our Series looking at the book of Revelation. The series is called eternal hope and encouragement in the face of present difficulty.

10:00am @ HopeTikipunga - Cath Bremner (Revelation 6)

9:30am @ HopeCentral - Lorne Campbell (Revelation 5)

9:30am @ HopeOnerahi - Howard Carter (Revelation 4)

All sites will require a vaccine pass, a non-vaccine pass service is available in the lounge at HopeCentral.

We will also be zooming the service.

Zoom service

The worship service at Central is zoomed each Sunday.

The zoom link is <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89285364673>

If you are using an app on a mobile device the meeting **ID number is: 89285364673**

You can join via landline.

Please note that the process has changed. The phone number is 09 884 6780 you will need to input for the meeting

The number when Meeting ID prompted: 89285364673 followed by the # key. Then you will be asked for a further ID number or to press the # key again. Press the # hash key again. The host will ask for your name so we can put it on the computer screen so after the service people will know who you are.

After the service we will break into small groups so people can catch up, pray with each other. If you are on a landline you can unmute yourself by pressing *6. If you have someone on a landline in your group please introduce yourselves to them.

Music Connect group Wednesdays 7:30pm HopeCentral

Starting this Wednesday there will be a new connect group starting in the worship area at HopeCentral. Primarily it is for musicians and while the core group will be those who help lead at HopeCentral, we hope that people who want to be involved in worship music from all our sites might feel like joining. To grow our musical ability, connection between musicians and instrumental (good pun) in our worship repertoire. Plus it'll be fun and fellowship, prayer and care. So if you are interested come along on Wednesday.

Meet the WEBBYs for morning tea, HopeOnerahi Tuesday March 1st

Come join us for morning tea with Greg and Lisa Webby.

Greg & Lisa Webby have served in the Arab world for 27 years, 17 years in North Africa, and for the last 10 years in the Arab Peninsula. In North Africa, they were involved in an Agricultural community development project in the Middle Atlas Mountains in partnership with the local department of agriculture. In the Arab Peninsula, besides personal outreach to friends, they have been involved in training in Arabic language and cultural fluency for new workers coming to the field.

Greg is originally from Whangarei and his parents were part of the Onerahi branch of Hope Whangarei. Lisa is from Brazil and they met in North Africa.

Our Daily Bread Ministries.

Some of you at Hope will be aware of the ODB stand we have at Central with many free resources in it.

One of the resources is the 3 monthly devotional which we display and some people take and use.

We have just had the following email from ODB advising us that the March/April/May 2022 edition will be late in arriving:

*We need to advise that the **March-April-May** edition of Our Daily Bread will be delayed. Most of you would know that normally you would receive your quarterly devotional around one month before the start of the next quarter. Due to the shipping delays please be advised that the likely delivery to your letterboxes is now going to be early March. Please continue to pray along with us as we seek other alternatives for printing and shipping for the future months. Whilst waiting for your mail you might like to try our recently launched new phone recording of the daily Our Daily Bread devotional if you would like to listen to it over the phone. If this interests you, please call us on (09) 444 4146 and follow the prompts. Terry Shearer ODB Australia*

There is also of course the ODB app accessed on cell phones and computers, which also carry the daily devotional with added insights.

COVID Health and safety

Basic health and safety measures for COVID will remain constant under the new COVID Protection Plan.

Hygiene: washing and sanitising hands.

Mask wearing: Mask wearing at gatherings like worship is "strongly" encouraged...

Scan or sign in using the COVID tracing app: This is mandatory for gatherings such as worship.

Please respect physical distancing: we are aware that some people are still very conscious of physical Distancing and we ask people to respect this.

Stay at home if you are unwell: The best way we can protect one another is to stay home and join worship via zoom if we are unwell.

The government's best health advice is to get vaccinated.

Government COVID suppression plan

Under the government COVID suppression plan (AKA traffic light system) Northland is under Red. Our services will require the vaccine pass and numbers at each service are limited to 100. A non-differentiated service will be held in the lounge at HopeCentral, under Red it is limited to 25 people.

With omicron in mind the government are also encouraging people to have a buddy system with another person or household, if in the eventuality of having to self-isolate then you have someone to check on you and shop for you if required. Please feel free to let us know at the church if you need assistance. Ring church office: 438 1667 or Howard Carter on 0277508602.

Blessing

This simple blessing comes from the end of the book of revelation. It is a prayer/benediction which John leaves his readers.

The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people. Amen.

Howard Carter

SENIOR**MINISTER**

HOPEWHANGĀREI

February 8th 2022

Ps: A Bird photo.

It was great to see three Tuturiwhetu (New Zealand Dotterels) at Matapouri on Saturday. Despite the storm damage to the beach, and the constant trek of people across the sand spit it seems that they had managed to nest there and listening to some locals, there had been chicks. One bird allowed me to get quite close as it sheltered from the wind behind driftwood and other flotsam.

