

We are leading into Easter this week, and much of my focus is on my message for Resurrection Sunday. This year during the season of Easter, stretching from Resurrection Sunday through to Pentecost, we are going to be looking at the accounts of the witnesses to the resurrection recorded in the gospels. Paul starts his long reflection on the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15 with a list of witnesses, people and groups who met the risen Jesus. We are blessed to have many of the accounts of those witnesses' encounters with Jesus in the gospel. We also have accounts of people, mainly the women, who Paul does not mention in his list. As a first century Jew Paul would not consider women able to be witnesses in the legal arena, but of course they are the first to meet and proclaim Jesus risen from the dead. They also stand as evidence that the story of the resurrection was not made up as Val Grieve says in his book *Your verdict (on The Empty Tomb Of Jesus)*, "If the story of Jesus appearance was made up it would start with Jesus appearing to a man- either one of his disciples, such as Peter, or even to his enemies such as Caiaphas, the high priest. "

But maybe I'm getting ahead of myself, looking at the empty tomb from this side of Easter. As I sat down to write the pastoral email this week, my eyes were drawn to a white pebble that sits on my desk, just beneath the monitor of the computer. A pebble which reminds me of the cross, and Christ's sacrifice for us.

When I was at Knox, twenty years ago, I went on a silent retreat at a catholic retreat centre in Oamaru. At one of the reflection sessions (when people could talk) a woman helping lead the retreat put a basket of stones in the middle of the group and invited us to select a rock. She said 'let the rock pick you, don't pick the rock'. Which I have to say, to me as a bloke, was a weird thing to say. It put me totally off. So I declined to be involved.

Anyway the next day I went for a long walk, through the town, out past where the blue penguins come ashore and down the wild coastline. It was a rocky beach and miles from anywhere I looked down and this pebble just stood out, it caught my attention, it was the white pebble on a beach of browns and greys. I had to laugh and say 'fair cop God'



as it was as if this pebble had chosen me. The white pebble of course is a biblical symbol, it is mentioned in Revelation 2: 17 as being given to those who overcome. In Roman society a white pebble was an indication of being found not guilty, being innocent... That is how it ties into Easter and the cross. Christ paid the price for the things we had done wrong, he made a way for us to have our sins forgiven the shame to be taken away for us to be declared not guilty and no longer under the power of sin and death.

The white pebble is a reminder for me of the great sacrifice Christ paid for us... as it says in Galatians 1:4 Jesus 'gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father'.

Have a wonder filled Easter this year.

Here are the notices.



Good Friday 'At the Cross' 9:30am Cnr Bank & Hunt St.

Come join us and fellow believers from right around the city at our Good Friday Reflection "At The Cross" if you would like to join a Good Friday March then meet up by Church Unlimited at 9:00am to walk/march down. We are meeting outside so if you can bring a camp chair or picnic blanket it would be a good

move. This year's theme is "Behold the Man Upon The Cross" and we will be reflecting on the person of Jesus through the lens of the "I Am" saying in John's gospel. There will also be communion. If it's wet the gathering will be in the hall... we'll need the space to fit everyone in.

Worship Sunday April 9th

Join us as we joyfully celebrate Jesus resurrection.

10:00am @ HopeTikipunga - Mark 16:1-11, Luke 24:1-12 (Pauline Hampshire)

9:30am @ HopeCentral - Luke 24:13-25 (Lorne Campbell)

9:30am @ HopeOnerahi - 1 Corinthians 15:3-8, John 20:1-18 (Howard Carter)

Easter Sermon series - Witnesses to the Resurrection

From resurrection Sunday through to Pentecost we will be exploring Paul's list of people and

groups who met the risen Jesus (1 Corinthians 15:3-8) and in particular looking at the gospel narratives of those encounters. I am hoping this will give us assurance of the physical resurrection of Jesus from the dead which is the central event of our faith and enable us to be confident in sharing this with people. In his Book the Verdict, UK lawyer and Christian Val Grieve says "A famous QC once said, 'when I have a poor case in court, I make a

long speech; but when I have a really strong case, I simply call the witnesses.'" For the resurrection the witnesses provide us with a strong case for its validity.



Easter Camp (Holy Ground Parua Bay)

Please keep the youth Easter camp out at Holy Ground this Easter in your prayers as young people gather together to celebrate and hear the Easter message. Many of our folk are involved in running the camp. On the Camp committee is John Schreurs. It is being directed by Roland Schreurs, Joy and Shane Jansen are involved as camp parents this year and Hannah and Amelie Jansen are on the leadership team. Pray for smooth running, for young people who do not know Jesus to have a chance to hear and respond to the Gospel.



Urgent accommodation request

A retired lady who is a member of our congregation and her son are urgently needing a 2 bedroom place to live, preferably with

lock up garage and of road parking if at all possible. She will consider any area in Whangarei.
Ph. 027 7253363

Community Wellbeing Initiative - Thursday April 20th and April 27th (6-9pm)

This is a course being run at HopeWhangarei in partnership with Lifeline and Presbyterian Support Northern. It is for a maximum group of twelve people and we have room available for people who may wish to attend. The vision for the initiative is 'to build a network of people within the church who have the confidence to support others emotional wellbeing.' It is described as...The Community Wellbeing Initiative has been developed for people who are 'natural connectors', that is, those who already play an active role in community-facing activities within or beyond the church and/or provide pastoral care to their congregation. The Community Wellbeing Initiative will give participants skills, tools and resources to look after their own wellbeing as well as be able to support others safely within their church and the wider community during times of stress or distress. As well as the two in person sessions there will be two online sessions as well. One beforehand and one afterwards. If you are interested please contact Howard for more information or register with Sharon.rossensor@psn.org.nz Please Note the change of dates... this is to accommodate our facilitators

Giving and Tax Receipts

Giving for the period 1 July 2022-31 March 2023 is \$164857.47 against a budget of \$174744.00. A deficit of \$9886.53.

Tax receipts for the financial year will be available shortly. Please let Karen in the office know, via email karen@hopewhangarei.nz, if you wish to receive your receipt via email or a hard copy posted or picked up.

Alpha @ BOB ... starting Wednesday may 3rd 6pm-8pm



As we are celebrating Easter this week we are reminded that the disciples could not keep silent about the fact that Jesus was alive and He rose from the dead!

This is The Good News we have to share today with a world that is losing hope.

Alpha is all about bringing people hope. That there is more to life than house, car, job, family, holidays and rugby!

Alpha has food... is free (unless you buy a coffee!)... And child care can be arranged!

There are **only 30 places available for the course**, so to ensure your friend can come, please invite them and then register them with Colleen at the office: colleen@hopewhagarei.nz or phone 09-4381667 - Lorne & the Alpha team



Child care during the Alpha Course?

Is there anyone in the fellowship who could serve the Alpha Course by **being part of a team** to provide childcare for parents who come to the Alpha Course **Starting May 3rd Wednesday evening from 6pm -8pm** . If you can help ... please contact **Pauline Hampshire 0272672155** or the office

A big Thank You

Wow it was amazing to see the amount of food which came in for the Central City Chaplain’s Easter gift. They were able to make up over forty gift packages from the church to give to businesses and people in the community as a way of acknowledging and blessing people this Easter. Thanks to the team who made, assembled and distributed this Easter blessing.



Blessing

Let me just conclude this week’s pastoral email with the wonderful summary of the Gospel and the Easter story from Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 15:3-4), possibly the oldest piece of Christian writing that we have.

“ For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,”

“I hoatu nā hoki e ahau ki a koutou i te tuatahi te mea i riro mai i ahau, arā i mate a te Karaiti mō ō tātou hara, i pērā me tā ngā karaipiture; Ā i tanumia; ā i ara ake anō i te toru o nga ra, i pera me tā ngā karaipiture;”

Blessings

Howard Carter

SENIOR MINISTER
HOPEWHANGĀREI

March 28th 2023



PS: - A sure sign my leg is on the mend I went out with my camera for short walk on the Onerahi

foreshore on Monday and found a Poaka (Pied Stilt) out wading and fishing amidst the wind and waves. A great image of perseverance and determination amidst the storms of life