

Ultimate hope in the face of climate change: Life revealed

Colossians 3:1-4

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May 2023

From where we stand the future looks bleak. In our time the planet tilts and threatens to tip us headlong into massive disaster. Young people find little to hope or plan for. As a pastor active in the climate space people often ask me – where is hope? What can we place our hope in?

Some argue that hope is a luxury we can no longer afford. But this is contrary to the Christian faith. For us, hope is so core to our very being, our world-view, that we cannot imagine life without it, for where God is, hope is, and our God has promised never to leave us. “I am with you” said Jesus. Jesus is with us through his in-dwelling Wairua, and Jesus will be totally with us one day.

Some hope for the end of this day. Bring on the disaster. Let catastrophe reign and all things crumble, for then and only then with Christ return and wipe away this mess and start over. I worry about that kind of hope because that way of hoping is ethics free. It lets us off the hook from having to actually do anything. That kind of hope does not sound like the Jesus I know. He could have said, “Don’t worry about the problems you see around you. Leave them all to me. I’ll deal with them in my own good time and till then just ignore the suffering.” But he didn’t teach that, did he?

No, Jesus said, Feed the hungry. Heal the sick. Fight injustice. Live into my Kingdom.

So if Christian hope is not just sitting back and waiting for God to miraculously intervene, then what is it? What do I hope for?

I would like to read a piece of scripture which at first read might seem anti-eco.

Colossians 3:1-4

So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ²Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, ³for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory.

Paul goes on in the rest of chapter 3 to describe ‘how then shall we live?’ – what it means to live life in the here and now, on earth, so that we live into the life that will only be fully revealed when Christ returns.

And for us looking into environmental disaster, we might write our own list of how we should live in our time, honouring not just people but also other living things, living an environmental ethic of care, being renewed in our minds towards all the earth.

Which is all well and good but it does not answer the question – Where is our hope?

For all our best efforts to live well will not ultimately save us.

Only Christ can do that.

Only God can save the world. We cannot.

So what do I hope for?

I hope for resurrection. If the New Testament is clear about anything it is adamant about this – our ultimate hope, our ultimate future, is resurrection. Christ is the first fruit from the dead. Our life is hidden with Christ and will in God's time be revealed. Paul uses one word to describe that resurrection future: glory.

Glory is what makes God God. Glory is light and infinite space and passionate affectionate love and brilliance beyond our seeing. Glory is what happens when our words run out. That is what resurrection is.

Thankfully we already got to see resurrection up close and personal – well, some of Jesus' closest friends did, as they touched him and talked with him in his there-but-not-there body, his scarred-but-fully-healed body.

The Bible is 100% sure that this is what awaits us – resurrection. Not some kind of spiritual wafting disembodied heaven on a cloud somewhere. Christians believe in the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come.

For me, in my own puny little brain trying to make sense of our ultimate hope, I figure that it is not just us that will get resurrected, it is also Planet Earth. The new heavens and the new earth that we look towards has to include God's dearly-loved creation. It just has to.

Redemption has to include biodiversity. Which is all way too big to grasp. But for me it is vital to hope.

I breathe in the hope that scripture promises like I am desperately holding my head above water. I have to hope or I will drown. Why bother without hope?

You have died and your life is hidden with the Messiah in God.

**When the Messiah, who is your life is revealed,
then you also will be revealed with him in glory.**

I will be revealed, the truest me there is, restored in a resurrection body.

You will be revealed, the truest you there is, given a resurrection body.

The earth itself will be revealed, in its true glory, resurrected because it will be found with Christ in God.

When Paul says, "Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth" I do not think he is telling us to ignore the ground we walk on and the living things what share this planet. I think he is telling us to lift up our courage and live into our true identity – that is our hope.

We are not defined by climate change. Climate disasters will hit us but they will not steal our faith. Why? Because we have died in Christ already, and he has our lives all wrapped up in his glory life. Nothing that happens to us this year or next year or next decade, nothing, can take us out of his life.

And one day, one day, that life will be everything. It will be so vivid and tangible and utterly utterly alive that all death just crumbles away.

This is my hope of glory. Not just human only. And certainly not just our souls floating about with harps. I hope for resurrection, beyond climate catastrophe, beyond our fears, beyond death, together with God's amazing Creation. Life abundant. Life indestructible. Through Jesus Christ who is the resurrection and the life.

Amen.