

Rev Tim Perkins  
June 10<sup>th</sup> 2020

**“If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.” 1  
Corinthians 15: 19**

Dear Friends,

We were lucky enough as a family to get tickets to go and see Les Miserables in Manchester last year. It is a powerful and moving story about law and grace, duty and compassion, the struggle for equality and freedom from the oppressive systems and structures of life in France in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. It is a commentary both upon the circumstances of life that led to the French revolution and upon human nature. But it has as its underlying principle the theological idea of resurrection. It is the belief that beyond death there is a place where all things will be put right.

It is such hope that gives courage to those who work towards a vision where the new world pictured in Revelation 21 impinges upon this old one and brings transformation. It is such hope expressed through the powerful stories of sacrificial love and grace which enables the passing of the torch from one generation to another in the inexhaustible and irrepressible march towards freedom and equality in this world for all people, even all creation.

Sadly, Les Miserables is as much a commentary on the oppression, inequality and hoarding of resources by the rich and powerful today as it was in 18<sup>th</sup> century France. It still speaks to us. It still offers the good news of the gospel of love, grace and self-sacrifice for the disarming of the powers that be and the restoration of true humanity through the in-breaking of the Kingdom of God.

The point of our faith in God and our hope for eternal life in God's glorious kingdom, is not that we can cease from our striving for a better world but that our future hope inspires the way we live our lives now. That future hope is not just wishful thinking. It is based on solid reality. And that reality is the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. Without it we have no certainty. Without it we are merely clutching at straws. Without it, there is nothing to drive us forward towards the enactment of that vision of a new world. As Paul says in the quotation above: *“If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.”* If Christ has not been raised, our faith is useless and we are still living from our sinful, broken human nature.

The central message of the Christian faith is that Jesus of Nazareth has indeed been raised from the dead. That message has transformed the life of this world in so many ways: through art and culture, through literature and language, through social justice initiatives that have paved the way in feeding the poor, establishing health care and hospitals, providing education for all, working for the lifting up of all who have been put down, tackling the evils of slavery and racism and much more besides. The effect down the ages of Christian experience has been transformative.

Sadly, the Church has not always got it right. Too many times it has been sucked into the lust for power and cosied up too closely to the state. But if it were not for the Christian experience of the resurrected life of Jesus, this world would be a vastly poorer place. Countless millions of people of every colour, race and nationality have experienced the risen Jesus. They come from

different economic, social, and intellectual backgrounds. Yet they share a common experience of the risen Jesus.

Imagine that you, truly, madly, deeply believed that Jesus rose from the dead and that he can influence the way you live today through the gift of the Holy Spirit living in you. How would you respond? How would your life change? What would you do with that news? What would the church do with it? If it is true, and I passionately believe it is, then it simply must change everything. It must be the single most important event in the history of our world, and it must be the single truth around which we arrange and dedicate every fibre of our being and our lives.

The resurrection of Jesus and the transformation of heaven and earth is the good news we are called to experience, to share, and to live out in this world. It is the power behind all our attempts to make this world a better place. It is the power that drives us from our comfort zones and calls us to re-enact in our day, and our place, the great themes of the story of Les Miserables.

Many of the churches in our Circuit are about to embark upon the final block of theme preaching for this year, in our series looking at what it means to be “in Christ.” We shall be looking at six passages from the Epistles that describe something of what it means to have “Hope in Christ,” and how that future hope impacts upon our present reality. It will provide the opportunity for us to reflect upon how we can allow God to transform us so that we can help God transform this world, and my goodness, how it longs for transformation!

Perhaps you might spend sometime this week reflecting on how you and your church can work for the transformation of your local community, how you can challenge the injustice, the inequality, the racism and poverty that blight so many lives not just around the world but in our own society. Our predecessors in faith worked for the abolition of slavery, the establishment of health care and education for all, the care of orphans and vulnerable older people, the reform of the prison system and they challenged the causes of poverty and the evils of addiction. We see the resurrection life of Jesus at work in them. And we are challenged to look at our society today and ask ourselves, *“how can we have the same impact? How can we work for the transformation of our community and our world? How can we share our faith in word and action?”*

For a start we can continue to support the social justice work of the wider Methodist Church through organisations such as Action for Children, All We Can and MHA. We can continue to nurture and develop our Circuit CAP Debt Centre and support the work of the Beamsley Project. But there will be more local issues in each of our communities which will require our attention if we are to share the resurrected life of Jesus and the love of God in order to bring that new world into being.

So *“Will you join in our crusade? Who will be strong and stand with me? Somewhere beyond the barricade is there a world you long to see? Do you hear the people sing? Say do you hear the distant drums? It is the future that they bring when tomorrow comes.”*

In the power of the resurrection, through the love of Jesus Christ let us commit to building tomorrow, today.

With every blessing,

Rev Tim Perkins

## **Notice – MHA Sunday**

The second Sunday of June is normally MHA Sunday, a special day in the year when we focus on the work of Methodist Homes and the support for people in older age. Due to our church buildings being closed MHA Sunday has been postponed until later in the year. However, a special service has been organised for this Sunday at 3pm. It can be accessed online at: [www.mha.org.uk/mhasunday](http://www.mha.org.uk/mhasunday)

This service will be one of reflection, memorial and appreciation for all those impacted by COVID-19, across MHA homes, schemes and beyond. We hope you will find this service a helpful moment to pause, reflect and pray together in these challenging times.