

Hope, Healing and Holiness.

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(This was given on the first anniversary of the passing of Resolution 84 by the 10th Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia.)

We are people in need of hope, healing and holiness in our lives. God can only bring about change as we allow him to begin in us. We cannot be agents of change unless we are people of hope, who have found healing in Christ and are living holy lives.

Hope:

As Christian people, our hope must be in God and God alone. If we have hope in people, systems, institutions (these things are idols by the way) we will be disappointed. Always. When our hope is in God, however, our faith grows. Listen to Hebrews 11:6 in the Message : *"It's impossible to please God apart from faith. And why? Because anyone who wants to approach God must believe both that he exists and that he cares enough to respond to those who seek him."*

Do we believe these things? Does God care enough to respond to our prayers?

Hebrews 11 and 12. There are many examples of people of faith who had hope in the promises of God. They hung on, in faith, until they saw these, often seemingly impossible, things happen. It was then credited to them as righteousness. They are a model for us of faith-ful behaviour.

So:

- Is our hope in the God who came to us as Jesus and is revealed to us in the Scriptures or is it somewhere else?
- Are we allowing that hope to build our faith or not? Nothing will change in the UCA without faith that by the grace of God He will do something.

None of us has suffered to the extent that our Lord Jesus did for us. Nor will we have to. He did it for the joy that was set before him. He knew where he was heading and was not deterred, even by the cross.

Hebrews 12:3- 4 says *"Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood."*

It's tough but not impossibly tough. Where is your hope? On what is it founded? Will you say with the psalmist : *"Why are you downcast O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise Him, my Saviour and my God."* (Ps.42:5, Ps.43:5) Worship is great medicine for the hopeless heart by the way.

Healing:

Psalm 103: *"Praise the Lord O my soul and forget not all his benefits - who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion, who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagles."*

Isaiah 53: *"But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him and by His wounds we are healed."*

Healing comes through the cross. It is also released as we forgive others and repent of our sins. We cannot afford the luxury of going around wounded and maimed spiritually. There is work to do.

Hebrews 12: God allows us to be hurt and in pain in order to bring us more and more into the likeness of His Son Jesus. Times are tough and many things have happened to hurt us in recent times to say nothing of the hurts of the past we haven't dealt with yet.

Now is the time to deal with this stuff, to get on our knees alone or with others who can help us in prayer and allow the crucified Saviour to heal our wounds. He suffered far more than we are suffering for the joy that was set before him. What are you looking at? The issues and the problems which are causing you pain or the future of all believers? And so with Paul and James we can rejoice in these hard times. Rejoice because they give us the opportunity to become more like Jesus and to grow in our faith. (Phil.4:4, James 1:2-5.)

Holiness:

Who may ascend the hill of the Lord? He who has clean hands and a pure heart. So do we have clean hands and a pure heart? Are we in the right place with God and with each other. There are many instances in Scripture where the people thought they were right with God and they weren't. The only way we will go forward is if we walk in holiness before the Lord and in right relationship with each other. That way when the fires of judgement come they will not scare us or harm us, in fact we will be able to rejoice in them.

Jesus said we should live each day as if it were our last. We don't know when He will return but we must be ready. Similarly we don't know the way forward now as people of the Uniting Church but we must walk with integrity and humility each and every day looking for and moving with the wind of the Holy Spirit. He alone has the answers to our questions.

This is about the Kingdom of God, not a denomination. It is about the body of Christ, of which the UCA is but one part. I don't know what the future is for the UCA or even if there is a future for it. At what point do we as a denomination cross the line from being a part of the body of Christ? Does the UCA ever stop being part of the body of Christ while there are faithful believers within it?

What I do know is that we must be faithful and true disciples of Christ as far as we know how. We must proclaim the gospel within and to the UCA and insist on Godly principles to guide us. We must be the watchmen on the walls that Ezekiel wrote about (Ez.33). It gets very wearying to be constantly calling out a warning to people who don't see that there is anything to be warned about. But we must do it. We will be ridiculed and falsely accused for doing it but we have no other option.

In summary:

- We must ensure that we have our hope firmly placed in God and His love for us.
- We must ensure that we deal with the issues of the past at the cross of Christ or we will be too wounded to go on and seek healing for the body of Christ along with our brothers and sisters of other denominations.
- If the UCA is an idol in our lives then let us lay it down now. Let us surrender our selves and our denomination to the God who loves us and hear what His Spirit is saying to the church. In the letters to the churches in Revelation there was always a way forward.
- Have we discerned our way forward?
- What is it that we are called to do to return to purity before the Lord?
- What is the Spirit saying to us, the church?
- We must be holy as He is holy (1Peter 1:15-16). Clean hands and a pure heart will get us to where we want to be, looking our Saviour in the face and hearing the words "Well done, good and faithful servant."

The future of the UCA is in God's hands. We are his co workers on earth and so we must ensure that we are in the right place to do His will.

What is the Spirit saying to the Church? Do we have ears to hear?