

Moderator's Easter Message

The adaptations of Victor Hugo's novel, *Les Misérables* contain what must surely be one of the best portrayals of the Easter story in action.

The character Jean Valjean, speaking of the bishop's kindness says, "He gave me hope when hope was gone, he gave me strength to carry on". That is the Easter message as understood by Christian people - the story of the power of forgiveness and of resurrection hope.

As Valjean understands and appreciates the mercy, forgiveness and new hope that has been given to him – at a huge price – he then goes on to serve, sacrifice and save others throughout his life; even forgiving and trying to set free his archenemy Javert – the man who has a life-ambition to imprison him. Valjean's line to Javert is pure grace, "You are free, there are no bargains or petitions". This is the Easter message.

For Christian people Easter, if it means anything at all, means hope. The resurrection experience is all about a new beginning, a fresh opportunity, a new identity. But someone else pays a huge price for this – Jesus.

I realise that for many of us in New Zealand, Easter is more about a holiday from work than anything else. The hope we are searching for is a holiday! So much of our effort, time and energy in life go into work. It is where we strive to find purpose, meaning and even hope. Yet, we still long for a rest from work whenever that is possible. Work never seems to satisfy the deepest need within us.

Many years ago an ancient Hebrew philosopher considered where humanity finds meaning in life. He summarised the search for the meaning of life in three projects:

- (a) The search to make sense of life through learning and wisdom
- (b) An effort to make life fulfilling through the pursuit of pleasure
- (c) The quest for achievement through hard work (Ecclesiastes 1 and 2).

In the end he concludes that none of these projects can deliver a meaningful life.

"So I hated life, because the work that is done under the sun was grievous to me. All of it is meaningless, a chasing after the wind." (Ecclesiastes 2:17).

As a nation we are debating a living wage and the Mondayising of certain holidays. We want more reward from work and more paid holidays from work. As good as these projects are they will not fully satisfy. The real hope of life is more than work or rest; more than pleasure and leisure. There is a spiritual dimension that brings a greater sense of fulfilment. Satisfaction comes, as Valjean learnt, through receiving grace and giving grace to others.

While we take time for leisure and pleasure this Easter, and enjoy a rest from work, may we as a people also give "hope to people whose hope has gone, and give them strength to carry on". As Jean Valjean learnt – in all the things of God – when we give away what we have, we end up having more of it ourselves.

- The Right Rev Ray Coster
Moderator