



Anglicare Sunday Horizons of Hope

Jeremiah 29: 11

For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with **hope**.

Romans 5:1-5

5 Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. 3 And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, 4 and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, 5 and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

I want you to imagine you are sitting on a sandy beach in the pitch black.

You can feel the cold sand under your feet, you can hear the crashing of waves but have no idea how close they are. You are scared, you are alone and you are cold.

You can hear someone approach. Anxiety rises in your body but they introduce themselves. They ask if you would like a blanket. You say yes out of relief as the cold had ached into your very core.

"What are you looking at?" they ask, as your eyes are looking down and you cannot see much at all.

The stranger speaks again. "Can I encourage you to look up; look to the horizon, and there the first rays of dawn overwhelm your eyes."

This image is what it is like to go from a life with no hope to a life filled with hope.

The Bible tells us without hope, people perish.

In the book of Jeremiah we have the words of God's promise, "For surely I know the plans I have for you," says the LORD, "plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with **hope**."

The recent lockdowns in NSW and the ACT have seen a repeat of the anxiety experienced in the first lockdowns of 2020. Families can't leave their homes, people living alone are left further isolated, and those who are vulnerable are struggling the most.

People come to emergency relief services for help wearing T-shirts wrapped around their faces because they haven't been able to buy a mask, or asking for food which they have to eat while stranded in their cars as they have no-where else to stay during lockdowns.

The local Anglican Parishes and Anglicare teams across the region are working hard to remain a safe place and haven of stability for people most in need. Many not-for-profit church agencies and their partnered churches are also doing the same.

One of these people is David.

David is in his 40s and lives in Canberra. In early 2020, at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, he found himself struggling mentally and emotionally. The trauma of being alone was compounded by other circumstances in his life that had left him further isolated and feeling like he had no-one to turn to for help.

When he was at his lowest, David reached out to the team at Gordon Community Centre. The centre is based in the south of Canberra and runs as a partnership between Anglicare and Lanyon Valley Anglican Church.

"I knew the community centre had a food hub, so I came here using that as an excuse to ask for counselling because I was in such a bad spot," says David. "There wasn't a counselling service offered, but one of the volunteers at the centre said 'There's a minister here. You can talk to him if you like?'"

Rev'd Jonathan Holt from Lanyon Valley church was working at the Gordon Community Centre that day and was happy to meet with David. *"I could tell that David really wanted to someone to talk to and connect with. He's such a generous guy who loves to care for people, and genuine connection was clearly on his heart,"* recalls Jonathan. *"I knew I'd need to do a lot of listening and make it safe for David to share as much of his story as he as he wanted to."*

Jonathan made time to catch up with David for an hour or so each week where they would discuss different issues. These catch ups continued by phone during the COVID-19 lockdowns. Jonathan was surprised and encouraged by David's courage and his dedication to meet up every week to discover truths within the Bible that addressed his needs and circumstances.

While most people who reach out for emergency assistance need food or help with bills, at Anglicare we know that often people are experiencing deep feelings of rejection, anxiety and disconnection. Many times this sort of need is hidden out of shame or guilt. Anglicare, with the support of church partners like Lanyon Valley Anglican Church, want to see these hidden needs addressed too.

"Coming to Gordon Community Centre was one of the best things I've ever done! I've been speaking with Jonathan since 2020 and it still continues to this day," says David. *"It's changed my life dramatically. Through Anglicare I've found my belief in God again. I'd lost my belief. Just catching up with one person, and discussing this one book [the Bible] has changed my life!"*

David now lends a hand with events at the centre by cooking on the BBQ and assisting the volunteer team. An estimated 80-100 people come through the Gordon Community Centre every month to receive food assistance, participate in the playgroup activities or informal classes, and join the community lunch or just catch up for a 'cuppa'. All these activities are designed to support the local area and keep people connected, with services adapting and continuing, even during COVID-19 lockdowns.

"I want other people to be part of this centre in the same way as David so they can begin that step by step journey to healing and connection with others," explains Jonathan. *"In the years we've been running Gordon Community Centre so many lives, like David's, have been changed. We want this centre to continue to be a safe place where people in any kind of need can come. The kindness shown by the staff and volunteers here is the type of care that can change lives and communities."*

Local volunteers with a heart for people in their area assist at the centre, giving the building a warm and friendly atmosphere.

"When I walk in each week, the volunteers know my name and call out hello to me," says David. *"Outside this building, people look down on me and I don't feel that I'm worth much, but when I come in here I feel wanted and worthwhile. It shocked me a bit at first. It's overwhelming."*

Many times the work of Anglicare is evident in tangible ways through food parcels, material aid, case management or referral services. But the work of Anglicare is intangible too. David's story is just one of many in which Anglicare's services are a connection point where people find healing in their own hearts; where their view of themselves and their outlook on life can be transformed in healthy and truthful ways. For David, it led him to renewed faith.

Unconditional acts of love and messages of hope are freely given and with choice, agency and safety, they are freely received. When people are vulnerable and in need it is so important that no one uses a hand out or a hand up to manipulate them. This is what 'abuse' is. By creating a safe space to ask, share and explore questions of faith is crucial to reframing a marred identity or self-belief and can be a profound source of care. Christ's ministry included words of hope and that these words are part of long-term holistic ministry.

When you offer care to another human being you are helping them to lift their eyes to the 'Horizon of Hope' found in Jesus. I thank God for many people who sacrificially and simply care for another human being.

When Christians come alongside people ask if you might place a blanket on their shoulders, encourage them and invite them to lift their eyes, you shine the love and Hope of Jesus Christ into another person's life.

The passage in Romans says, "Suffering, brings perseverance, perseverance character and Character Hope." When other people see how you are fixing your eyes on the hope of Christ, others see the good that comes out of your life because of the freedom you have found in fixing your eyes on Jesus. They too, are intrigued to look to see the possibility of this horizon.

I started this sermonette with an image titled Horizons of Hope:

The beach scene, the sunrise, and the light breaking across the darkness. Jesus said "I am the Light of the World."

The warmth of God's love, expressed in Ephesians 2: 4 "But **God**, who is rich in mercy, out of the great **love** with which he **loved** us."

Seeing and having perspective on all that God has made, as expressed in Colossians 3:2. "Fix your eyes on things above, looking for the good, acknowledging the good, affirming the good and celebrating what God is doing in our midst."

This is the Horizon of Hope.

This Anglicare Sunday I encourage and invite you to look at and participate in this message. We go a long way to reduce poverty in this world when we care and support others so that they too can be encouraged to lift their eyes and see the resurrected Christ our living Hope.

Romans 5:5 says, "And hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us."