

My name is HOPE. **Fee Gardiner, 13 February 2022** NB Bible quotations from The Message Version

1 Corinthians 15: 12 – 20 & St Luke 6: 17 - 26

Teach us, dear Lord, to be your hope-bringers as we live and learn together in the flow of your love. Amen.

Good morning! I hope you are well today. I hope the weather clears up soon. I hope the roof in my garden room isn't leaking too much. I hope against hope that Russian aggression doesn't descend into war. I hope the new variant of Omicron is nothing to worry about. I hope... I hope... I hope...

Hope. Such an easy word, that trips off our tongues. And yet hope is one of the characteristics of living the Christian life. St Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 13:

For right now... we have three things: Trust steadily in God, hope unswervingly, love extravagantly. 1 Cor 13:13

St Paul, writing to the young church in Corinth, is really getting down to the nitty-gritty of the Christian faith. Can you imagine what it must have felt like to hear this letter being read aloud for the very first time? There's so much to learn. I wonder how often they had to re-read it!

And in today's section, Paul is very, very definite about what lies at the heart of our beliefs as God's Church: the resurrection of the dead.

He doesn't mince his words, does he?

If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. 1 Cor 15:14

More than that, we're false witnesses (v 15)

If Christ has not been raised, faith is futile (v 17)

If all we get out of Christ is a little inspiration for a few short years, we're a pretty sorry lot. (v19)

Recently, in the space of seven days I have conducted funeral services for four people. The thing that gets me through, and I trust I can communicate to grieving families and friends, is that God's love carries us beyond death into his very presence: that death is not the end of our stories because God has dealt with sin and shattered death at the resurrection of Jesus. That there is still hope in death as in life.

We believe, don't we, that the tomb was empty. The risen Jesus beckons us to follow him, to know hope as a daily reality, because death is conquered and we can enter the holy, everlasting presence of our heavenly Father. Because Jesus is risen.

HOPE: **H**e is **O**ur **P**romise of **E**ternity....a little acrostic!

Does this help us? Does our faith in the risen Lord bring us comfort, bring us hope? Does the thought of life with eternal dimensions with God lighten present darkness?

For Christians, for centuries, the promise of a better tomorrow after death has been what has helped them to keep going day after day, in the direst of circumstances. Just one example: the spiritual songs of the enslaved people of southern America, songs of suffering and faith.

*Swing low, sweet chariot ,Comin' for to carry me home;
and*

*Steal away, steal away, steal away to Jesus.
Steal away, steal away hoe,
I ain't got long to stay here.*

The longing for a different world, a world of justice and love was the hope that filled hearts. As we look back at slavery, we can only stand in sorrow and awe. Sorrow at such barbarity perpetrated on living people. Awe at such faith, such firm hope. And this chimes well with Luke's version of the Beatitudes we heard earlier. Such hope there, such positivity.

*You're blessed when you've lost it all.
God's kingdom is there for the finding.*

*You're blessed when you're ravenously hungry.
Then you're ready for the Messianic meal.*

*You're blessed when the tears flow freely.
Joy comes with the morning. (Luke 6: 20, 21)*

Such hope! Such promises!

BUT: While it's inspiring there's more to these than promises of 'hope-to-come.'

Look where this account of Jesus' ministry takes place. He's just appointed his apostles and he's come to a level, open area and the crowds have flocked to him. He is filled with healing power and compassion and the sick and the sad are cured and uplifted. This is not hope for some distant future fulfilment...for these people on the receiving end of Jesus' touch it was real right then and there.

There's a rather dismissive saying: *Oh, she's so heavenly minded, she's no earthly good.* What a dreadful thing to say. And yet, there's a kernel of truth in it.

Our faith, our hope is not all about a far distant heavenly home. That's part of it. The nub of it. But the kingdom of God isn't just in the future...it's right now, in all the weary grind of daily living.

While the enslaved sang and hoped and had faith, others were inspired by their faith to right injustice, to abolish such unutterable cruelty.

When William Wilberforce became a Christian in 1785 his life and lifestyle were transformed and he embarked upon his lifelong battle for reform and for social justice.

He became an abolitionist and headed the parliamentary campaign against the British slave trade for twenty years until the passage of the Slave Trade Act of 1807.

Our faith, our hope must be lived out in the reality of our lives. Just as Jesus healed the sick who stood around him, so we are duty bound to give account for the hope within us by being salt, being light, being hope givers, being practically helpful. Fighting for justice. Speaking truth to power. Doing what we can, all we can, to imitate our Saviour in our attitudes and actions with the help and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

We are Hope bringers because not only is He our Promise for eternity, but **HERE IS OUR PROMISED ETERNITY**...it began as soon as the stone rolled away from the empty tomb. It has been building from moment to moment, day to day, century on century. Is still building.

Does the daily news cause us to ache with sorrow? Do we weep for the state of the world: the starving and suffering in Afghanistan; the hopeless in Ukraine; the stateless and homeless across our globe? The jobless, the unhappy, the suffering sick who live next door to us; our beleaguered Health service?

We are **here**. We have **hope that defies the odds**. It's the same hope that has conquered death. **Our God is a great big God.**

He is not confined to the pages of an ancient text or within the walls of church buildings. He is not the sole property of academics, theologians, philosophers.

No, **we** are **his** people, his adopted children, his **game-changers** and his **peace-makers**.

So let's take time daily to sit with God. To know his power. To recognise once more the hope within us.

Then let's get out there and make a difference.

Or as St Paul puts it:

Let's trust steadily in God, hope unswervingly, love extravagantly.

And when we face challenges about who we are in the power of the risen Saviour, let's know that our name...my name...your name is **Hope**.

Amen.