

Forward with Hope. 30/04/21

All my hope on God is founded;
he doth still my trust renew.
Me through change and chance he guideth,
only good and only true.
God unknown, he alone
calls my heart to be his own.

Martin Luther said 'Everything that is done in the world is done by Hope'

At the beginning of this month we celebrated that wonderful story of Christ's Resurrection from the dead. Easter is a festival of renewal, a story of Hope, if ever there as one! We need hope to move forward.

What is Hope – a word we have said and heard a lot recently.

A simple definition of Hope is 'the feeling that what is wanted can be had or that events will turn out for the best' this is a wish or desire. But the word Hope has a deeper meaning for us; it is 'an assurance based upon a sure foundation for which we wait with joy and full confidence'. It is an expectation with certainty that God will do what he has said.

All summed up in the familiar words of the hymn quoted above, 'All my hope on God is founded'.

What does hope mean for you? Have you felt hope-less? Is your hope founded on God or have you struggled with that? Do you hope on hope that all will be right? **Pause**

Hebrews 11:1 "Now Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see"

'Over the past twelve months there have been occasions that many of us have found hard to manage and Hope has often been too difficult to hold onto. In the Bible the book of Lamentations describes how the people lost hope and felt abandoned by God after the destruction of their city Jerusalem. Their distress, anger and sense of hopelessness can resonate with us today. It seems to echo some of what we felt during the Lockdown and the Covid restrictions. It tells of how without hope life loses its meaning but.... in the middle of all this despair there comes some positive, verses – verses that give a spark of great hope and faith. They remind us that in times of despair, sorrow and doubt God is always present.

Reading – verses from Lamentations

1:1-2 'How deserted lies the city, once so full of people! How like a widow is she, who was once great among the nations! She who was queen among the provinces has now become a slave. Bitterly she weeps at night, tears are upon her cheeks.

1:11-12 All her people groan as they search for bread; as they barter their treasures for food to keep themselves alive. "Look, oh Lord, and consider, for I am despised. Is it nothing to you, all who pass by? Look around and see.

1:16-26 This is why I weep and my eyes over flow with tears. No-one is near to comfort me, no-one to restore my spirit. See, O Lord how distressed I am!

3:18 So I say, "My splendour has gone and all that I had hoped from the Lord. I remember my affliction and my wandering, the bitterness and the gall. I well remember them, and my soul is downcast within me. Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope.

'Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning: great is your faithfulness. I say to myself. 'The Lord is my portion; therefore I will wait for him', The Lord is good to those whose hope is in him; to the one who seeks him; it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord.' **Pause**

'Great is Thy Faithfulness! Great is thy Faithfulness!

Morning by morning new mercies I see;

All I have needed thy hand has provided –

Great is thy Faithfulness, Lord unto me.

Words of a very well known and loved hymn – a hymn but also a prayer of love, faithfulness and hope.

'The Lord is good to those whose hope is in him'. We have seen and experienced God's Faithfulness through the selfless dedication of all who worked tirelessly in our hospitals; through the skills and determination of our scientists working to find a vaccine; through the good neighbours who helped and supported those struggling in their communities; through those unsung workers – supermarket workers, the dustmen, the bus drivers who carried on with their work in spite of everything; through the marvels of modern technology that has helped us keep in touch with each other and through the invaluable little kindnesses offered to us by friends, family and even strangers – a smile, a Hello, a phone call or letter, willingly doing a favour.

*So take a moment to think of the times and ways you have received or experienced God's faithfulness during this difficult time – those moments that have given you some hope. Then also think of all of those little kindnesses that perhaps you have done. They not have seem much and you probably have not thought about them again but for the person receiving them it could have meant a great deal, it could have given them that little spark of hope that they so needed. Thank God for his faithfulness. **Pause***

Prayer God in his faithfulness is working with us, for us, in us in His many ways not only in this country but throughout the world.

Father, Thank you that in a world of despair, You are our Hope. In a world of darkness, You are our light. In a world of sorrow, You are our Joy. Help us to share the Hope of our hearts with one another. Enable us to give hope to others through your work amongst us. Amen **Pause**

In Jeremiah 29:11-12 we read

'For I know the plans I have for you' declares the Lord, 'plans to prosper you and not harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.

In Proverbs 23:18 we read

There is surely a future hope for you and your hope will not be cut off.

These are comforting words as we face a new, uncertain world. The global pandemic has changed or destroyed so many of our personal certainties and securities but in the darkness a light of hope is beginning to shine. We have come to see things differently, found out what matters to us and what can be cast aside and what we need to keep to in order to move on. The one constant in our lives has been God. In our hope and trust in God we can overcome the demands that have been placed upon us.

Prayer Light of the World bless all who are in darkness, shine upon us in love. Be with the despairing, support the depressed, comfort the anxious. Give us your hope, give us your joy, and give us your peace. Lighten our darkness today and evermore.

In a moment of quiet – Offer to God your hopes for the future for yourself; for family and friends, and your hopes for the many troubled parts of the world and pray to God for the courage to wait. Pause

Prayer O Christ our morning star, Splendour of Eternal Light, shining with the glory of the rainbow, come and awaken us from the greyness of our apathy, and renew us in your gift of hope.

1 John 4:16

'God is love, and those who live in love live in God, and God lives in them'. Love never fails. Even in the darkest moments, love gives hope.

Job 11:17-18 Life will be brighter, than noonday, and darkness will become like morning. You will be secure, because there is hope; you will look about you and take your rest in safety.

As we emerge from our period of darkness in to a new future – it is to remember that the message of Easter is one of Hope in a changed world. We look forward now to Pentecost – and the coming and of the Holy Spirit-good reason to hope.

Romans 15:13 May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace so that you may overflow with hope as you trust in Him through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Say The Grace together.