

Hope is the thing with feathers....



Do not worry.

It's quite a tall order when there's so much to worry about.

I don't know what's in your own stories, but we live in a world of unexpected tragedy, of violence, war and climate change. Of internet abuses and the need for safeguarding. Worries for ourselves, for our children and grandchildren, for our communities and for our environment. No matter how firm your feet are, we know that life can sweep you under... Just Like That. We know that, we experience it, don't we... my experience / your experience... we are human, living in a fragile world.

Do not worry, says Jesus.

And this is the Jesus of Matthew's gospel. This is the gospel that gives us Holy Innocents. The murderous rage of a tyrant king, and Jesus himself as a child refugee, with the authorities wanting to kill him. Not too many chapters on he will be crucified, summarily executed with an unfair trial. Beaten. Shamed, publicly.

Jesus knows human experience.

Do not worry, says Jesus

Jesus speaks to Jews under Roman Oppression, where summary violence and unfair crippling taxes are not news. A world about to collapse. The world probably felt about as unstable as ours does right now It's not that he, or his context, is divorced from reality

The history of the world is still unfolding, and there is plenty of pain, suffering and struggle out there – and perhaps within our hearts too.

Does it look like the world has been redeemed? Not often.

Do not worry, says Jesus

He wants us to go deeper. To know, and trust, that God is with us. There is a greater power than the powers of destruction and fear.

There is an empty cross, and an abiding presence.

For in hope, says S. Paul, we are saved.

Hope. It's a powerful thing.

Hope is the thing that says to despair – with confidence ... *do not worry*.

all will be well (somehow, impossibly) *and all manner of things shall be well*¹.

Today is Racial Justice Sunday, and we look with thanksgiving for ground gained, and with hope for a more equal justice still to come.

Faced with the immovable object of American Apartheid, and thousands of people living in fear and ... yes, worry.... Deep crippling fear and anxiety for their very lives. Oppression and degradation....

Martin Luther King Junior said these words only a few months before his assassination....

***We must accept *finite disappointment*, but never lose *infinite hope**²**

Hope, says Martin Luther King, - says S Paul – says Jesus - is a choice we can make - a deep-seated commitment to trusting that there is a way through.

Follow me, says Jesus. *Be strong and of Good courage*³. I will show you the way.... *"It is the Lord who goes before you. He will be with you; he will not leave you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed"*⁴, says the writer of the book of Deuteronomy.

For in hope we are saved, says S. Paul, the groans of creation are but labour pains, of a new gifting of life and future. And like all life, this comes from the darkness of the womb, the places of un-knowing, and yes, even the pain of labour and the shock of birth.

¹ Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*

² [Martin Luther King, Jr.](#) spoke these words in a Washington, D.C., address in February 1968, just two months before he was assassinated in Memphis.

³ Deuteronomy 31: 6

⁴ Deuteronomy 31: 8

For in hope we were saved. *Now hope that is seen is not hope, for who hopes for what is seen?*

It is beautiful to have this reading just after Candlemas. – a feast when we celebrate the light in darkness, and we bless candles to remind us that light is there, and to help us to shine that light into the world. Paul tells us there is something to hope for, but he stresses that hope is by its nature something projected into the dark⁵, birthed from within the darkness.

So how dare we hope? Well, hope is founded on experience. Our lived experience is that Jesus has shown himself present and at work in every human situation – selflessly pouring himself out, working within for life. Why do we hope? Because we know his power to deliver.

*Give us this day our daily bread*⁶, we pray at every service in church – reminding us that we were taught to trust in the Wilderness, and again on the road to Emmaus when bread was broken even after the Cross. To hope, with justification, that what we need will be there. There is a way through... though it may be through the cross.

Hope helps us grow – *for who hopes for what is seen?* – it reminds us to yearn for – to reach for – what is not yet fully seen. In the faith we live in the between-times. The now and not-yet.

The truth is that although all that needs to be accomplished has been accomplished – the victory is won, and it's just a matter of walking home.... We do have to walk home.

The reality is that every moment – every place, every time - has been opened to God's healing, and the breaking through of his Glory. We have the promise, and the confidence, that God is the end of the story, even if from moment to moment there is struggle and uncertainty.

Martin Luther apparently said that if he knew the world would end tomorrow he would plant a tree – meaning that he trusted that even when the world falls apart around us, there will be a point to goodness, and a need to plant it in this world. That what is good, and life-giving and blessing, and defiantly Hopeful... will last, will endure, *is worth holding on to, no matter what.*

Keep hoping, says Paul, says Jesus, says Martin Luther King.... Keep dreaming

King writes: *If you lose hope, somehow you lose the vitality that keeps moving, you lose that courage to be, that quality that helps you go on in spite of it all. And so today I still have a dream*⁷

⁵ Rowan Williams, *Tokens of Trust* Canterbury Press, 2007. pp.96-97

⁶ The Lord's Prayer - found in Matthew 6:9-13 and Luke 11:2-4

⁷ *Martin Luther King: The trumpet of conscience*

For in hope we are saved, says Paul. The Christian Call to one of our most powerful missions – the Rejection of Despair and the Defiant Stand for Life.

*For hope springs eternal in the human breast*⁸

What, then, is hope.. this dream, this life-giving force, this power of trust and faith, and joy.... ?

Hope... I believe is one of the many works of the Holy Spirit within us.

The poet [Emily Dickinson](#) said as much in her famous verse:

Hope is the thing with feathers
That perches in the soul,
And sings the tune without the words,
And never stops at all.

Jesus says *do not worry* - not to say the troubles and challenges of this life are not real. But to remind us of a deeper truth. Not to get drawn into anxiety and spirals of despair but to look to a deeper truth.

Have you watched *The Shack*? Do you remember the scene where the main character of the story, Mac, is in a small boat on a large lake, and a huge dark storm blows up and the boat is filled with fear and begins to sink? Jesus appears, and says to Mac... 'Look at me, look at me, not at the Storm'. He doesn't say the storm isn't there. It's real enough whether is meteorological or *psychological* (or both).

He says look at me.

Believe.

Hope.

Trust.

Just keep looking at me, and we will get through it.

Hold to what is fast,
strong and true.

Your heavenly Father knows you need all these things.

And I tell you... Do not worry.

Hope, Dream, and even if the world ends tomorrow.... Why not plant a tree today.

Trust in the Holy Spirit, the life-giving presence of Jesus,

For Hope is the thing with feathers...

⁸ *An essay on man*, Alexander Pope