

Resources for Churches...

Responding to the Coronavirus

Finding Hope

Hope

A tender touch
Gently holding
Carefully cradling a broken heart
And hope stirs

A resonant stillness
Resoundingly hushed
Wordlessly sheltering wounded souls
And hope awakens

A hand of blessing
Generously offered
Freely welcoming outsiders in
And hope breathes

A compelling melody
Intricately weaving
Gracefully awakening silenced voices
And hope sings

Chris Matthews <https://www.thefuelcast.com/library/2020-10-21-hope-poem-r3>

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

We all need hope. And the more challenging and disturbing our circumstances, the more we benefit from being sure about what we hope for. These words of the apostle Paul written to the community of believers in Rome remind us that our hope is found in God, that we can be filled with hope through the indwelling of his Spirit in our hearts, and that we can be used by God to bring his hope to those around us.

But what is it that we hope God will do for us?

- Some people would say our hope is in the fact that God is able to change our circumstances and make difficult times come to an end so that things get back to 'normal' in as short a time as possible...



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- Others would say it's more like a 'beam me up, Scottie' idea – that God is able to take us out of our hard situation – either through moving us to somewhere new or through the hope of going to a better place when we die, so although the situation still exists, we are not in it.

- But what we most usually see in scripture is neither of these – it is that the situation by and large stays the same, but God comes to be with his people in it and gives them joy and peace and courage and strength and perseverance and all that is necessary to live well and hopefully within the challenging time.

We will soon be in Advent when we reflect once again on all that it means that Jesus came to be 'Immanuel', 'God with us' (Matt 1:23). In Jesus, he chooses to be with us in the struggles and trials of daily existence and bring his kingdom near (Mark 1:15), beginning the process of putting things right and restoring the world to how he originally created it to be. Jesus teaches his disciples to be hopeful and pray hopefully – 'your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven' (Matthew 6:10), looking forward to the day when the kingdoms of earth and heaven will be one, and there will be no more death, pain and tears (Rev 21:1-5). But as the story of his time on earth unfolds, we discover Jesus is nothing like the Messiah that everyone expected; he doesn't fix the circumstances - the Romans remain, the oppression and injustice continues, the fortunes of the nation of Israel are not restored. Jesus' way of doing things is by suffering alongside everyone else, of being vulnerable and weak, of experiencing loss, frustration, anger and heartbreak, of learning as you go along, of not having all the answers, and of needing to depend on his heavenly Father. So when we talk of our hope being in Christ, it makes sense that we should expect that this is what things will look like for us too. When we face hard times and suffering seems to go on and on, they are not some blip in the system, or a case of God having forgotten us, but those in which we can discover his presence and working to make things better, even though the situation itself may not immediately change.

John the Baptist was so unsure about Jesus that at one stage he sent his disciples to him to ask, 'Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?' (Luke 7:20). Jesus' response was, 'Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor'. Jesus' way of doing things is to start with people, making things better in their individual lives, bringing about change and transformation in God's ways rather than in ways earthly rulers might employ.

We are people who have hope because we believe in a God who is good news. God is coming to make everything new (Rev 21:5); he is coming to put everything right and restore justice, righteousness and truth (Psalm 96:13); the earth will one day be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea (Isaiah 11:9). And Jesus has already set this whole process in motion, by coming to start to sort things out, to make things new, to transform lives. And when we also look and listen, we can see the signs of these things around us. Although our overall circumstances may not be about to change, we can still discover Jesus at work around us bringing healing, comfort, new life and hope.

But, getting back to where we started, there is another dimension to being Jesus' disciples other than being hopeful and praying hopefully, and that is living hopefully. It all comes back to those words of Jesus that we have been reflecting on since Pentecost: 'As the Father has sent me, I am sending you' (John 20:21). Jesus continues his work of making things better and transforming people's lives through the work of his Holy Spirit in the lives of his followers. Remember his words: 'Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father' (John 14:12). His intention is that we all will 'overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit' (Romans 15:13) so that we not only have hope ourselves but that we are people who share hope and build hope in our world today. As individuals we are to be beacons of hope and as churches to be communities of hope. And the more we allow the Holy Spirit to rule in our hearts and work through the way we live, the more God's hope and transformation will be seen in our world today.

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- How would you explain to someone else what you have hope in, even in the most difficult of circumstances?

- What other Bible verses remind you of the hope you have?

- Consider cultivating your hope by keeping a journal - write down in a notebook things you notice in the events of the day, in what you read, in thoughts that come to you as you pray, or ideas that come out of a conversation with someone else in which you find hope, so that you have them to read on days you feel less hopeful.

- Where are places that hope is needed around where you are – at work, in your community, amongst your neighbours, in your family or church family?

- In what ways is the Holy Spirit prompting you to bring hope to others at this time? Have you acted on them or made an excuse?

Read again the poem above. Imagine God working in this way through you. What is your response?

To pray:

that we become people who are hopeful, who pray hopefully and live hopefully

that God will fill us with his Spirit and use us to make things better in the lives of people around us

for opportunities to bring life and hope to those around us

“May the God of hope fill ME with all joy and peace as I trust in him so that I may overflow With hope by the power of the Holy Spirit”

