

25 September 2022

Trinity 15C
St Mary, Salehurst

1 Timothy 6: 6 – 19

Luke 16: 19 – 31

I see that I have been given an interesting topic for this morning: **Where is our hope?** So let's begin with St Paul's prayer for the Ephesian church:

*"I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the **hope** to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints."*

(Ephesians 1: 18)

Hope is one of the most powerful influences in human life. It seems to be a general necessity for all of us, even if there are no rational grounds for it. Hope is what often enables us to walk through the most desperate situations. Regrettably it is often consigned to a rather negative wish. People say things like, 'I hope it doesn't rain today' (which means it probably will!); or 'I hope she turns up' (which means she probably won't!). Many a person has been left saying 'I hope it's going to be alright,' when really feeling quite desperate.

The Bible sometimes uses the word in its conventional sense; the hope of harvest sweetens the farmers' hard work (1 Cor. 9:10). But generally the biblical writers have a quite different view of hope. Hope in the Bible is a strong, positive word. It means being assured, confident. "And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us." (Romans 5:5). It is not a wish or a dream but a confident expectation.

I think it is something that her late majesty Queen Elizabeth understood as her life was grounded in faith in Jesus Christ. And remember, faith is believing in things hope for.

This confidence is grounded in an historical judgement regarding Jesus Christ and our personal faith experience of God's presence in our lives. We can be confident, regardless of how we feel or what our circumstances are, because Christian hope is placed in God, not in science, technology, evolution, progress, human nature, or anything else. It's partly about what God will do in our lives in the next week or year.

Much more profoundly, Christian hope is about what God will do at the end of our lives, and at the end of human history.

And so our Gospel reading illustrates this last judgement for us all. Do we place our hope in this worlds' riches as the rich man does in Jesus' story? Or do we hope in God?

In a chapter that seems dedicated to the issue of wealth and how we use it, this story deals only incidentally with wealth. It's concerned rather with how we use our possessions, and more specifically, how we treat those who are less fortunate than ourselves.

There's much we could say about Lazarus and Dives, as the rich man is sometimes known. Incidentally, Lazarus is the Latinized form of Eleazor, which means *God is my help*. He's the only person in any parable who is given a name. And he's the poor man, someone who is generally anonymous in history.

On the other hand, the rich man, the important character, is unnamed. This isn't insignificant. If we study the parables,

this should take us by surprise as we might think that the rich man should have a name as well. Maybe that's why he is often referred to as Dives.

In many ways the parable is there to challenge us about how we use our wealth, our possessions. Do we help others in need, or just look after ourselves. How easy it is to make excuses – after all we say, 'charity begins at home'.

Yet if we hope for an eternal future with Christ our use of possessions and our treatment of others matters.

Of course, we are saved by faith and not by works. Yet it's clear that we shall be held to account for how we lived. Is it in keeping with the faith we proclaim? Is it true to say that 'our hope is in God alone'?

So let's look a bit more at what we mean by hope.

Hope is found where there's belief in a living God who intervenes in human life and can be trusted to keep promises. Where there's no belief in God, there can be no real hope for

the future. As St Paul puts it, ‘remember that [the pagans] were without hope and without God.’ (Ephesians 2:12). In fact hope is inseparable from faith. It’s because of what God has done through Christ in the past that we dare to expect future blessings, ‘On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us.’ (2 Corinthians 1:10).

So many in our society today have a sense of hopelessness, and yet God is the God of hope. When we become Christian, when we receive Jesus as our Saviour and Lord, then we come into the covenants of promise made available to us because of the saving work of the Jesus Christ. Our sins are forgiven and we who were once far away from God are brought into a living relationship with Him. We’re with God and we have hope, because he is the God of hope.

Then we should be abounding in hope: ‘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.’ (Rom. 15: 13)

The Bible offers some helpful pictures to show how hope will support us in our Christian lives. One is the picture of a ‘helmet,’ ‘Put on ... the hope of salvation as a helmet.’ (1 Thess. 5:8). Our hope of salvation is the armour that keeps us safe from all the doubts and fears for our future.

Another picture found in Scripture is hope as an ‘anchor,’ ‘We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary...’ (Hebrews 6:19). Our hope is firmly placed in the place where God is. Providing a secure hold to enable us to face all the storms of life.

Finally, although Jesus never explicitly referred to hope, he told us not to be anxious about a future which is firmly in the hands of our loving heavenly Father. ‘Your heavenly Father knows that you need [these things].’ (Matt. 6:25ff.).

If we truly hope in God it must affect the way we live. As the Gospel story shows us, the values of the kingdom of God demand more equal sharing of the good things of the world. The values we hope to see and that God proposes for human society are values we do well to consider.