

Trinity VI (Proper 11) Year A 2020

I was struck this morning by a phrase we heard at the end of today's reading from Paul when he says *'In hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what they already have? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.'*

What do you think he is saying? Is he saying that when we see something, we don't hope for it anymore? When Paul asks, 'Who hopes for what is seen?' I fear that I am tempted to answer ME. Surely, at the most concrete level, in some way we all do! Children certainly do, and even as adults, we tend to hope for things we have seen. People wouldn't want lovely things, or cars, houses or whatever if they'd never seen them. But giving Paul due respect, we do also dream of hopes unseen.

Prisoners and slaves dream of liberation even if they've never been free. Lives that have never known justice still long for it. People who have never known real love still yearn for it. Where do our dreams of things like peace, justice or love come from? For me I think that it's safe to say that our inbuilt dreams: our hopes, our deepest heart-longings come straight from God, who has planted them in our hearts to help us remember who we are and where we came from. God has placed a longing for justice, peace, and love into our hearts to help us find our way home to him. That longing, that yearning to trust, that eagerness for goodness, is hope. So I think this is how we hope for things unseen.

Paul goes on to say, *'But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.'* But what on earth is he thinking of? Hope and patience? Aren't they mutually exclusive? For children, patience tends to be thin on the ground (it certainly was for me as a child!). Yet as grown-ups we still ask, 'Is it time yet? Will we get there yet?' When I hope for justice, peace and love, I really do want them now! In our so-called concrete world, it seems as if patience and hope exist in an inverse relationship - too much hope (anticipation or eagerness) means an end to patience. Too much patience can lead us to passively give up hope. But look at where we are with the current situation of a world shaken by a virus. Humanity has been drawn up short and given cause to consider the very fundamentals of who we are and how we live our lives. For you and me as Christians, we are called to proclaim a new kind of hope that is full of trust. We trust the promise that God has given us: that in the end, all things will be united, and God will make all things right and new - hope and patience held in balance within the love of Jesus Christ.

So how hold these things together in harmony? Perhaps this is where the parable can help us. When Jesus was preaching in a society dependent on the harvest, a farmer would sow his crop, and sometimes an enemy would come and sow other seed in the midst of it. We are not talking about any old seed. Jesus is probably referring to darnel – a type of ryegrass which can be poisonous. There is a reality to this parable, and during the Lord's time there were strict Roman laws forbidding such action. As darnel grows, it looks like wheat at first, and then the roots get tangled up with the good wheat, so if you pull one out, you uproot the other. That's the image Jesus wants us to have in our minds. In the parable of the wheat and the tares, he is reminding us that evil and good happen in life together. Good things are of God and evil is not, but in human life the two are so intermixed that we often cannot

root out the one without seriously affecting the other. However this is not just a parable about good and bad people.

Our passion for truth, justice, fairness, and goodness are planted in our hearts by God - a sign that we are made in God's image. We hope for goodness because that is how we were created. Jesus says that we can't expect to be able to discern and root out evil all by ourselves. It can't be done by unassisted human effort. And remember that God can often bring great goodness out of something that starts out badly. Good and evil can be so intertwined that destroying one could destroy the other, and this is where patience becomes a gift. We just need to be patient long enough for God's redeeming love to sort things out.

Jesus says that when it is time for the harvest, God will arrange to have the evil collected and set aside, and the good will abide. When Matthew was writing, he was perhaps thinking of the early church - how to tell what and who was right or wrong. He was reminding his Christian community that no one was perfect. It is the same for us. The words of the parable may entice us to think of some individuals as wheat and some as dandelion or tares, but we know that most humans are neither wholly bad nor good.

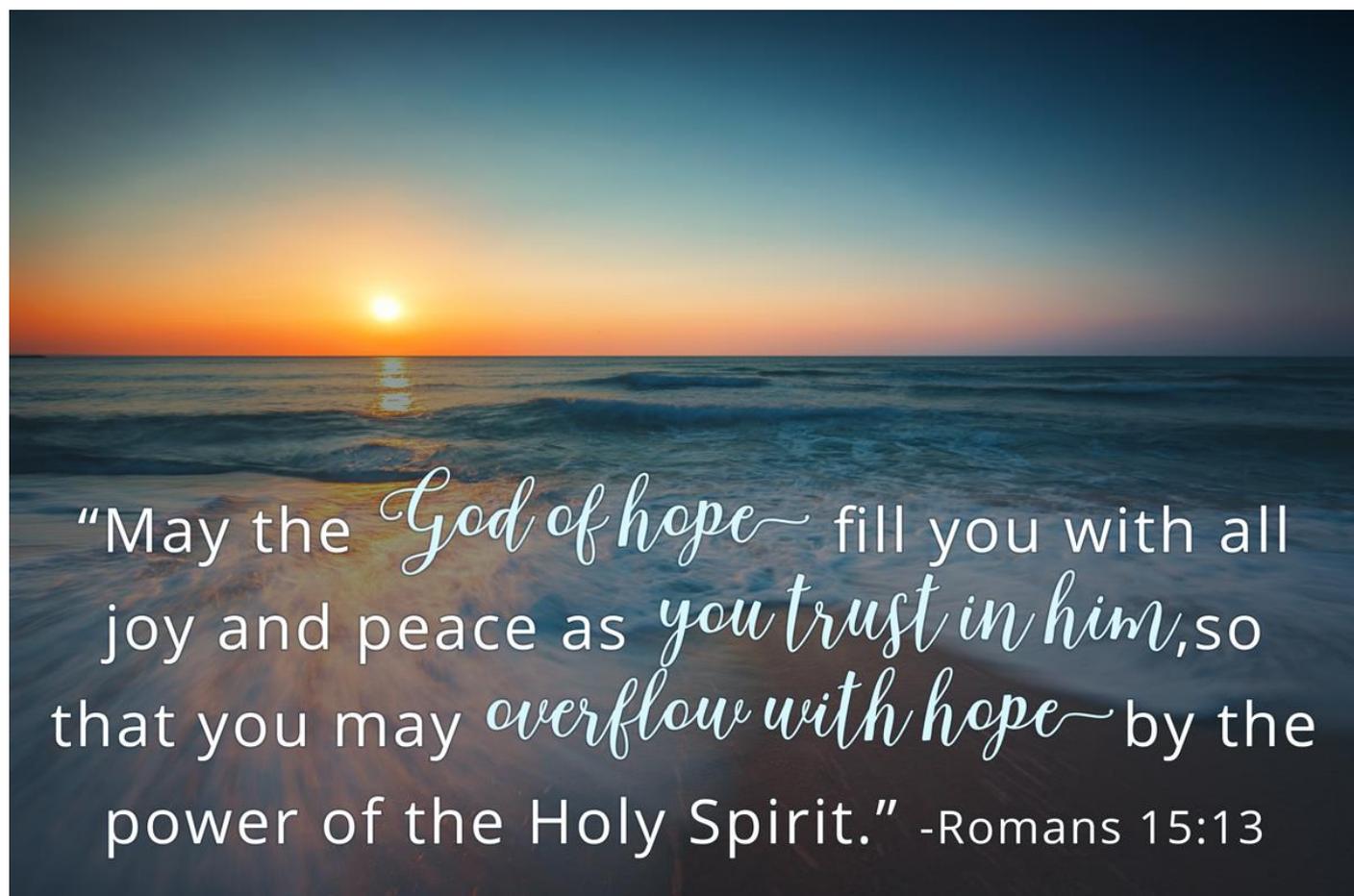
Imagine the winnowing of the wheat from the weeds in terms of one human life. Imagine a time when the self-destructive, unloving, non-joyful parts of our lives are collected up and thrown away like weeds - all those bad traits that make me stumble when I am trying to be good: anger, impatience, scorn, self-loathing - we all have them in some shape or form. And Jesus says, 'The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his Kingdom all causes of sin and all ungodly characteristics and bad things you may have done, and they will throw them into the furnace of fire.' That, to me, would be the best of good news - that all destructiveness I may have done, and those wrongs done to me, taken away and destroyed.

So therefore I believe it when Jesus says, *'In the presence of God, the righteous will shine like the sun.'* I believe that whatever is left after the evil is winnowed away: the good and striving and blessed and righteous in each of us will be there - part of that great sunrise.

Possessions come and go, but the goodness and love of God for creation endures. Christian Hope has more confidence and eager expectation than the hopes and dreams of the material world because God is the maker and keeper of promises, because it is God who has planted this confidence and expectation, that glorious vision of the kingdom in our hearts in the first place.

Of the patience Paul spoke about, it is important that we don't settle into complacency. Our life in Christ is about God with us and in us - here and now. God will make everything right in the end, so we can wait with *good* patience and cheerfulness. In the meantime, though, we must remember that God has no other hands in the world than ours. God has no voice in the world but ours. We must cry out for justice with God's voice, we must work for peace and freedom with God's hands, we must continue to find and honour Jesus Christ in all people with his love, and we must do all of this with passion. Jesus has planted the good seed within us, and it is God's will that this seed should bear good fruit.

So ultimately Paul is right. The more trust we have in God's promise, the more patiently we can wait for the fulness of God's love to be revealed. We therefore must be passionate about bringing hope into the world today. It is a double responsibility - hope and patience. But, thank God, it is a double gift as well.



"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

Wisdom 12: 13, 16-19

There is no god besides you, whose care is for all people, to whom you should prove that you have not judged unjustly; For your strength is the source of righteousness, and your sovereignty over all causes you to spare all. For you show your strength when people doubt the completeness of your power, and you rebuke any insolence among those who know it. Although you are sovereign in strength, you judge with mildness, and with great forbearance you govern us; for you have power to act whenever you choose. Through such works you have taught your people that the righteous must be kind, and you have filled your children with good hope, because you give repentance for sins.

Romans 8: 12-25

Brothers and sisters, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh— for if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, 'Abba! Father!' it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him. I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we

wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

Matthew 13: 24-30, 36-43

Jesus put before them another parable: 'The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well. And the slaves of the householder came and said to him, "Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where, then, did these weeds come from?" He answered, "An enemy has done this." The slaves said to him, "Then do you want us to go and gather them?" But he replied, "No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. Let both of them grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn." '

Then he left the crowds and went into the house. And his disciples approached him, saying, 'Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field.' He answered, 'The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man; the field is the world, and the good seed are the children of the kingdom; the weeds are the children of the evil one, and the enemy who sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. Just as the weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, and they will throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let anyone with ears listen!