

Reflective Worship
5th Dec 2021

Hope

Luke 1:26-38

Matt 1:18-25

So, today we're thinking about "hope". And I guess when we planned that 'hope' would be this month's "small word with a big meaning", we were thinking in terms of the ultimate Christian hope – God's promise that one day Jesus will return in glory, and all things will be made new.

The beautiful picture painted at the end of the Bible of the fulfilment of God's kingdom, where God and his creation are fully reunited -

Then I saw "a new heaven and a new earth," for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. ² I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ⁴ 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

⁵ He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!"

Rev 21:1-5

But ... last week being Advent Sunday and all, we covered that in Paul's sermon during Morning Worship. If you missed it you can find it on [YouTube](#) or [on the website](#) (just click on the links) – though I would recommend reading it! And the sermon spoke of the Christian concept of "hope" as being that wonderful picture which God has promised, a future certainty, but for which we have to wait in expectation – a bit like spring following on from winter.

But, of course, when we use the word 'hope' in our day-to-day conversations, we don't usually think of hope in these terms. More often we mean something between a wish and an aspiration. "I hope that I'll get to see the family over Christmas" for example.

And that's obviously a perfectly valid meaning for the word. We 'hope' things in this way all the time. St Paul and St John in their letters spoke of 'hoping' to be able to visit the recipients of those letters.

So this afternoon, we thought we would spend some time thinking about our hopes, our aspirations, our "wishes".

And I think that sometimes there can be a tendency for those of us who try to follow Jesus to think that our wishes, hopes and aspirations should be only directed towards improving the lot of others. That we should only find our pleasure in that, and that it's not really ok to hope or aspire to good things in our own lives. To enjoy life.

And yet, when I look at Jesus, that's not really what I see. According to John's gospel, his very first miracle was changing water into wine. And whilst, yes, I know, that also had a huge spiritual significance – actually what it did in immediate, practical terms was to ensure that the newly weds and their guests had a pretty good time. An around-150-gallons-of-top-quality-wine good time. And as we know from other passages, he didn't just sit on the sidelines and watch piously. The religious leaders condemned him as a glutton and a drunkard.

Not that eating and drinking are the only way to enjoy life, but you get the idea. Right from the very beginning, from the Eden story, God has given us the gift of good things, which he wants us to use. Yes, we need to use them thankfully, respectfully, fairly... But they are to be used.

“I have come that they may have life, and have it in abundance”, says Jesus.

So, yes, it's ok to have our own hopes and aspirations.

I would be astonished if Mary and Joseph didn't have their own plans and dreams before the angels came. They might not have been particularly uncommon or exceptional – a happy marriage, a family, health, work, peace.... Each other. Hope for their future together. The sort of hopes and aspirations that many of us have at that stage in our lives. One of the beautiful things about the Christmas story is that the people in it are incredibly....ordinary.

And what of God? What of God's hopes and aspirations? God's dreams and plans? I wonder if the whole of creation as it was intended to be *is* actually a picture of *God's hopes* – of love and harmony, relationship, beauty and joy - lived out in physical form, growing, multiplying. Being 'very good'.

Our hopes
God's hopes

And when they come together, what then?

What of Joseph's hopes? He married the woman to whom he was betrothed.... and played his (largely unrecorded) part in the greatest events in history.

What of Mary's? God took those and transformed them into something she could never have imagined. To be the mother of the One who would restore God's hopes for creation. They made their hopes (and fears) available to God – and he transformed them into something amazing.

I don't know if you've ever worked with an expert in their field? Some years ago we decided to revamp the rather dingy kitchen extension on our home in Bentley Heath. We had a few ideas, which we shared with the architect/plan drawing person. They listened, and then said "how about if we do it this way?" And they took our basic idea and turned it into something stunning. Something that was what we wanted – but so much more than that – because they had to vision to see what it could be like.

And I wonder – is it like that when we truly bring our hopes and aspirations to God? When we offer them to him and say, 'Over to you. Make of them what you will'?

How often do we truly trust God with our hopes and dreams, and then trust him for their fulfilment?

How often do we acknowledge and give thanks for what God has already done in and through us?

Maybe we should look to the closing festival of our Christmas celebrations – to Candlemas, the presentation of Christ in the temple, when we meet Simeon and Anna¹. We don't know Simeon's age, but Anna was certainly very old. Both had what we might call 'life experience' under their belt. And both, on that day, saw their hopes fulfilled in a way they could not have imagined.

So we're going to spend some time now, looking back, with thanks, at the times when we have made our hopes, our dreams, our lives – whatever – available to God, and we have seen what has come of that.

It may be that you think – I haven't done much. But in the topsy-turvy world of God's kingdom, what we think of as the tiniest things are the biggest. That first step of some sort of faith or trust is by far the most challenging, the hardest and the greatest.

Maybe your thoughts will focus on your hopes for yourself. Or for the Parish. Or something else. It really doesn't matter. We are just seeking to discern where we have offered our hopes and dreams to God, and to thank him for what has happened.

Play some music. Offer some cards to write on. Light a candle to say thank you.

And now we're going to look forwards. What hopes, dreams, aspirations do you have that you can offer to God? Again, it may be something personal to you. Or it may relate to the Parish. Or something else entirely. Can you give it to God, so he can transform it – maybe into something completely unexpected.

Play some music. Offer some cards to write on. Bring and light a candle as an offering.

¹ You can read Simeon and Anna's stories in [Luke 2:22-38](#)

