

Sermons at All Saints, Anglican Church of Luxembourg

Preached by Rev Geoff Read on Sunday 22nd September 2024 (Creationtide 2)

Bible text: Romans 8:18-25, plus vv26-28

Last week we started our exploration of what Christians mean by hope and especially how that shapes us as we join with others in facing the climate crisis where people feel such sadness at the destruction, anxiety about what comes next, but also frustration with one another: for the role of humans in causing this crisis by over consumption in the first place, and also by denying or playing down how serious things are and refusing to act

In addition to the insights of eco-psychology, we met a German theologian, Jürgen Moltmann who has done important thinking about hope

He said: “Christian hope draws the promised future into the present day and prepares the present day for the future.”

This week we are looking what it means to draw the promised future into the present day: how we pray with hope

Next week Alison will talk about act in hope, how we prepare the present day for the future

Christian Hope is less about the What and more about the Who, the God who has always had good plans and purpose for the whole of His creation

The God whose ways are far beyond our understanding and imagination

Last week we saw three metaphors in Romans 8 that give us insight into what God is doing

He is freeing creation from a slavery to decay (v21)

He is doing something in and through creation as amazing as the new life that comes when a child is born (v22)

And He is using us, who Paul calls “the children of God” (v19 & 21), to bring a unique contribution to the care of creation, undergirding, foundational to what others bring

And that unique contribution, that foundation is Hope in God to fulfil His creation, covenant promises

As hope in this particular way how is that reflected in how we pray

Let’s read on in Romans 8:24-28

24 For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope, for who hopes for what one already sees? 25 But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

26 Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness, for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with groanings too deep for words. 27 And God, who searches hearts, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

Hope is of necessity about what we don’t yet see

And Paul says that part of that sort of hoping is “waiting with patience”

This is not the half-hearted optimistic waiting at the bus stop in UK where we are grateful if any bus even arrives

This is Swiss-style hoping for public transport – where people only emerge from their houses a minute before – such is the level of trust and expectation!

One writer I have mentioned, Peter van Breeman says: *The essence of prayer is not searching for God because that can easily become too active, but rather our waiting, our bearing with our own inadequacy. In waiting we experience our own powerlessness. Waiting does not come easily. God will come. This waiting is not empty, dead time. We wait for Someone.*

Before the enormity of climate crisis I feel so weak and powerless

Before all that is unfolding in Gaza, in Ukraine I feel so weak, so powerless. I do not know how to pray even when I want to

When Jesus began His ministry with the sermon on the mount He taught the Beatitudes – and among the first are those who are poor in spirit, who mourn in just the way we often feel as we are confronted with such pain, destruction, impossibility

And He declared those people, those children of God Blessed, made happy by God

As we read on in Romans 8, we come across exactly that sort of weakness – and the promise of the Holy Spirit's help in and through that weakness

READ V26: "... the Spirit helps us in our weakness, for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with groanings too deep for words."

This is what it means to be filled with the Holy Spirit: to mourn at the pain of eco-destruction, of war, so deeply that we are confronted with our emptiness so that we cry out to God to come fill us with His love, His power – not then so that we can do it

No, so that He keeps us in that place of weakness so that He, through His Spirit, begins to pray within us, and with us

READ v27: *And God, who searches hearts, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.*

And that "for the Saints" doesn't mean for our benefit. Note the bit about "according to the will of God."

No, "for the saints" means for us to fulfil our vocation, to be enabled to be children of God, those who are called to be shaped by Hope in Him and to shape the world around by that hope

Remember what Moltmann says: Christian hope draws the promised future into the present day

As Paul says next in v28: *We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose*

That's not saying He only does that working together in all things just for our good

No: what it means is that as, with the Holy Spirit's empowering, we experience, expect, trust and hope this working together for "good" in all things to be true in our own lives, so we bring all of that to how we pray for the world with hope – that's what Paul means when he calls us those "who are called according to His purpose!"

... God's purpose of saving and renewing the whole of His creation

Those who call Him: "Our Father"

And whose calling is to pray: "Your Kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven"

When we do that we are drawing the promised future into the present day

Let me tell you what that looks like in my life at the moment ...

As I look at Gaza, as I look at Ukraine, as I see the power of Putin, the menace of Trump, where do I start to pray?

As I have driven through the destruction in the Ahrtal in Germany less than 100km from here where lives were swept away by sudden floods in 2021 in the way they were again just last week starting in Austria, then Czech Republic, on to Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Germany, Hungary and Italy

Not to mention the pain of Pakistan, Bangladesh last month...

... I am learning to wait patiently and hopefully

I hope that in my stunned and pained silence in the face of all of this suffering the Holy Spirit is creating space to intercede in me and in line with the big purposes of God that I, as of now, cannot begin to even ask or imagine (Eph 3:20)

Out of this waiting I believe He has given me something small but powerful, a way to pray: and it is with the words of Mary in the Magnificat: bring down the proud and mighty from their seat, lift up the poor and lowly

I hope that it is through these so small things that the Spirit can work: through my love moved by the suffering of people and things in God's creation, my desire to see that change, my hope that this lies in God my Father, and the awareness of my weakness that opens the way for the power of God

As I hold before God these situations and pray these words that's what I hope plays some small part in drawing the promised future into the present day

What might such waiting, this drawing of the future into the present look like for you and how you pray in hope?