

St Bartholomew's Burnley, Sunday 14th June 2026

(Third Sunday after Pentecost)

I. The focus of our Gospel reading this morning is on mission. But before we look at our reading from Saint Matthew, it's worthwhile pausing for a moment to consider our second reading from St Paul. Not only because it's a beautiful and key passage but also because it's never a good thing to rush into mission without knowing what we're doing. We need to know the content of what we're trying to proclaim in our mission.

II. Paul is essentially talking about hope in this passage and he does so in trinitarian terms. He's talking about the reconciliation brought about by the Father, the self-sacrifice of Christ, and the Holy Spirit's love poured into our hearts. And hope in this context means our confidence in God's future, 'boasting' as Paul calls: not boasting in ourselves and our achievement, not even our faith, but placing our confidence in God who will one day restore all things, and who is already in the process of restoring all things, bringing about the final kingdom of God. Hope is a gift that's given us but it's also something that needs to grow and develop in our own spiritual lives.

And this hope doesn't deny for a moment that troubles exist, that we face difficulties in our lives, that we suffer anxiety and loss and grief. A theology that says God makes sure nothing bad happens to good people is a false theology, as the Book of Job in the Old Testament makes clear.

But what this passage is saying is that, with God's help, we can develop, we can grow through those difficulties. We can become more reliant on God, more resilient as people ('endurance'); our difficulties can even deepen hope as we give ourselves over to God more and more, more deeply and more completely. Hope is a gift and a consequence of our growth. Hope creates hope, strengthens hope, confirms hope.

And that hope is linked to the love of God that is poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit. Hope isn't a cold, calculating decision we make by examining the future not a breezy kind of optimism but rather a sense of God's love surrounding us, drawing us into God's future, God's renewed creation, the kingdom of God.

So what is the love of God really like? The image here is of a state of war existing between humanity and God. It's not that every single human being is at war with God but that humanity itself is at war with God in many of its behaviours and attitudes: in the lust for power and status, in greed and the pursuit of wealth, in unjust structures, in tendency to violence towards others, towards the earth. AI is a good example of how we're mindlessly pursuing a new technology regardless of its impact on people and the environment.

For Paul all this suggests an intrinsic enmity between us and God, a state of war. Because we've not made the weak and poor and vulnerable our priority above all else; because we haven't valued creation and the good things God has given us.

And precisely in this situation God's love displays itself, a dazzling beacon of hope in our darkness. Instead of judging us for our failures as a human race God has entered into the world and become a victim of that same evil, that violence, that injustice. Through Christ's death and resurrection, God has entered into our reality and transformed it from within, defeating the powers of evil. That's how much, how deeply God loves us. In that state of enmity God comes to us as friend, as vulnerable, self-sacrificing. He comes to us to offer friendship, to make peace: peace with himself that translates into peace in our lives, in our hearts, in our world.

And that's our boast, that's the basis of our confidence and identity: the hope that God gives us and nourishes in us, even in the pains and challenges of our lives.

III. So what does all this have to say about mission which is the focus of our Gospel reading? There's a very simple connection here. Our mission is precisely to offer that hope in a world where there often is so little hope. We're to offer the hope of God's kingdom, and that hope means showing the extraordinary and radical nature of God's love. It means working for peace and reconciliation, bringing about justice, working with God towards God's future.

That's our basic mission as the church, as this parish, as disciples, and we're called to it carry in simplicity of heart: with an open and inclusive love that gives hope to those in despair, in sadness; hope that opens the door of freedom on those imprisoned by poverty or despair or injustice.

Our first reading from Exodus has some beautiful images there of how God sees us as his own people. God regards us as a treasured possession, something beautiful and valued, even with the mistakes we make, the wrong turnings. We're called to be a priestly people, a holy nation, a people of hope in our hearts. to show forth God's love hope for a world that is so often forlorn and wounded and sad.

IV. The challenge from today's readings is a double one. How can we more fully and deeply embrace the hope we've been given? It's epitomised in the famous words of Julian of Norwich, 'All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well!' It's that sense of hope that we are called to grasp more fully in our lives, to embrace more deeply. And that journey is both personal and communal: it's about our lives as disciples and our lives as church.

And the second challenge is for mission: How can we bring that hope to the world, and how we recognise it when we see it already there in the world? The Spirit of God is already at work in the world, planting the seeds of hope. We need to identify them and rejoice in them, to encourage them and enable it to flourish. And our mission is also to display that hope in our own life together, in our commitment to love and justice, to peace and reconciliation.

Mthr Dorothy