

Easter Great Vigil

Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer of Life, fill us with your new life, complete in Faith, Hope, and Love. Amen.

Faith, hope, and love are inescapable in the narrative of holy week and the resurrection. It is the story of Christ's perfect Faith, Hope, and Love for and in God the Father. It is the story of Christ's Faith, Hope, and Love in and for us all.

It is also the story of the initial lack of faith, hope, and love, among the apostles. Despite all their time spent with Christ, they still didn't understand either the way we need to follow or the truth we need to know. In this there is hope for us all!

It was some of those who seem peripheral to the story who proved the most faithful and loving. It was the women who remained at the foot of the cross along, possibly, with John. It was the women, and two hesitant, secret, followers of Christ, Joseph of Arimathea, and Nicodemus, who undertook what they thought was the last act of love and care that they could offer to Jesus as they prepared his body for burial. Though their hopes were shattered they faithfully and lovingly did what they could.

This group, whom we too easily assume are peripheral to the story, showed a persistence of love and of some kind of faith, even when all hope was lost.

And so, it is to some of this group that the first glimmers of hope were revealed. It is to one of this group, Mary Magdalene, that the first revelation of real hope occurs. These

whom we so rarely consider central had the vital role of conveying the news of the resurrection to everyone else. How often do we discount the worth and faith of others, when realistically their lived faith might well humble ours.

We may wonder why they were not central to the ongoing spreading of the gospel. But, women were not considered reliable witnesses. Culturally, it was not possible for them to spread the gospel. Today, psychologists have shown that we are all unreliable witnesses. But we know that what Christ's followers witnessed was enough to convince them that Christ's good news was worth dying for.

Two thousand years on, we have a highly developed understanding of what the resurrection means and of who Jesus was. Jesus's friends and followers had the first shoots of understanding but it took the church centuries to come to agreement and the work in fact goes on afresh for each generation as the world around us continues to evolve.

So, given that the first followers of the way of the Nazarene didn't have a well-articulated, carefully crafted, set of beliefs, such understanding cannot be central to Faith, Hope, and Love. Rational arguments can help us to journey towards Faith, Hope, and Love. But Faith, Hope, and Love are gifts that defy simple categorisation. We experience them through the rational, through our emotions, through our very bodies. Rather than having their root in any one part of us, they encompass our whole being. Our experiences differ, as we differ and so we need the humility to recognise and value the insights of others and their unique journey of faith.

A couple of weeks ago, I admitted to how shaky my own faith and hope sometimes seem. Yet, that somewhat rationalistic analysis, is not the whole story, for any of us. The fact that we are gathered here is an embodiment of Faith, Hope, and Love.

In the faithfulness of the women and Joseph and Nicodemus, there is hope even for those who feel like hopeless cases. They acted out their dimly burning wick of Faith and Hope. We are assured a bruised reed [God's Servant] will not break, and a dimly burning wick [God's Servant] will not quench; [God's Servant] will faithfully bring forth justice. And God's Servant will not grow faint or be crushed until justice is established in the earth!

Tonight, we are celebrating our new life in Christ, a life full of Faith, Hope, and Love. We have proclaimed that we are followers of God's Servant, the Servant Master; we are God's servant. Sometimes, we will be the bruised reed or dimly burning wick in need of nurturing, care, and compassion. Much of the time, we are to be the ones who will not break a bruised reed or quench a dimly burning wick. Wherever we see Faith, Hope, and Love in others, just as Christ did, we are to cherish and nurture it, starting with one another. This requires tenderness, carefulness, gentleness, attentiveness, it requires God's help. It is hard to truly be there for another.

Our every action must reflect our Faith, Hope, and Love. So, we hold onto the image of Christ, washing our feet, our humble servant and master. And, reflecting that image we must become servants too and it is that servanthood that will,

slowly, bring God's reign of justice to the earth. I am more hopeful than I might sometime appear.

From a place of privilege, it is hard to recognise how unjust the world is. So, Christ has shown us the way, the way that cannot fail, giving up our own lives to humbly serve others.

There is no place for false humility in this. We must be prepared to offer all that we are and all that we have. Just as Christ did not deny his calling, even when washing his disciples' feet, so we must not deny our gifts and talents but rather be ready to use them to bring Faith, Hope, and Love to all whom we meet, in whatever way we are called to.

Christ's love was costly, and if it is reflected in us, it will be costly to us too. It is a life centred on God and others, a life of service and humility. It is not a comfortable life; it is a constantly and uncomfortably challenging one. It leaves no part of our loves untouched, unchanged; it will be a total transformation, if we all God to work in our lives as Christ has call us to. But it is also a life and a transformation that brings joy to others and ultimately to our own lives.

We have Faith, in the Hope, that through acts of Love, we can be the Christ-Light for others and can, one act of Loving-Kindness at a time, transform the world so that all may know the God who is Love and know that love in their lives.

May we, the Body of Christ, in this place, bring Faith, Hope, and Love to all the earth that all may know the joy of Easter, God's new beginning for all creation. Amen. Amen. Amen.