

Hope that can face anything!

St Paul said that his prayer for the church in Rome was; '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.'

There is a humorous story about a homeless man who was sitting begging on the street. As a stranger walked by, the homeless man put out his cap hopefully. A man put a ten-dollar bill in it. This went on each day for a year! Then suddenly the daily donation changed to \$7.50. "Well," the beggar thought, "I don't need to give up hope yet! It's still a lot better than nothing."

A year passed in this way until the man's daily donation suddenly became \$5.

"What's going on now?" the beggar asked his donor. "First you give me \$10 every day, then \$7,50 and now only \$5. What's the problem?"

"Well," the man said, "Last year my eldest son went to university. It's very expensive, so I had to cut costs. This year my eldest daughter also went to university, so I had to cut my expenses even further."

"And how many children do you have?" the beggar asked.

"Four," the man replied.

"Well," said the beggar, "I hope you don't plan to educate them all at my expense."

"In the winter of 1964, Nelson Mandela arrived on Robben Island where he would spend 18 of his 27 prison years. Confined to a small cell, the floor for his bed, a bucket for a toilet, he was forced to do hard labor in a quarry. He was allowed one visitor a year for 30 minutes. He could write and receive one letter every six months."

But somehow, he never lost his hope. Instead, Robben Island became the crucible which transformed him. Through his intelligence, charm and dignified defiance, Mandela eventually bent even the most brutal prison officials to his will, assumed leadership over his jailed comrades and became the master of his own prison. He emerged from it the mature leader who would fight and win the great political battles that would create a new democratic South Africa.” During those years Mandela wrote that his Christian convictions and faith sustained him in hope.

Vaclav Havel the former Czechoslovakian president was also in prison himself for over 5 years in his struggle for freedom. During that brutal time, he thought about hope a lot, and he came up with this statement: ***“Hope is a state of mind, an orientation of the spirit, an orientation of the heart. It is an ability to work for something good whether it succeeds or not. It is the certainty that something makes sense regardless of outcome.”***

Havel thought that this kind of hope had a mysterious quality. He said that it is not anchored in the world. It comes from beyond our horizons, in his words from ‘elsewhere’...this is a very different kind of hope to the one we are used to which is based on expectations and favorable outcomes...

Although we may not have been placed in the crucible of prison, there are many things in our society today that can drain the hope out of us.

It has been tough to breathe the air lately. Many people have become anxious about the Canadian forest fires. Because they are climate related and doing anything about climate change is so huge a challenge, many of us have lost hope that we can change in time.

On the personal level losing a job, serious illness, getting mugged, robbed or raped; losing a dear friend, being let down by someone you trusted; having to give up on a long-term goal; getting older

and losing strengths of mind, heart and body; facing retirement with pessimism, enduring a long loveless marriage that has ground us down, all these things can make us ask where is the hope?

When we lose hope, a slow kind of death starts to take us over. We numb out. We lose our inner joy. We become the walking dead, part of the millions who go through life with a quiet desperation.

The problem is this: most of us have our hope rooted in things going well for us. We remain hopeful as long as we are in love with our spouse. Life is just great when the job goes well, when our health is good, when the pregnancy results in a healthy birth. But lose that job, have cancer knock at the door, lose that baby and the hope drains out of us. But if that is all we know of hope, we have not yet understood or encountered the kind of hope that Havel is talking about.

For me the ‘elsewhere’ that true hope comes from, can only be from God. Now in order to believe in this kind of hope it is necessary first of all to believe in God. In the Christian tradition St Paul says that if we believe in God we can ask for this kind of hope as a gift! He says pray and ask that “The God of hope may fill you with all joy and peace by your faith in him, so that united by the Power of Holy Spirit you overflow with hope.”

But you say to me when your baby is still born, when your husband is dying of cancer, when you get fired and lose your job, when you get divorced and you feel abandoned, how can you be hopeful? How does faith in God help *practically*?

In the story of John, the Baptist, who was a forerunner of the historical Jesus, the story begins with a priest named Zechariah who was supposed to be a mouthpiece for God. But instead, he was an angry disillusioned man who was only going through the motions. His faith index was very low. He desperately wanted a son, but his wife Elizabeth was infertile and old. He had done what most of us do with hope. He had placed it entirely in externals. In the story an angel comes to him and announces that Elizabeth will

get pregnant. Zechariah does not believe it and the angel, because of Zechariah's lack of faith, strikes him dumb. Now he is really going through the motions as a priest- that is all he has left!

But you say to me; "So, he still had his faith in externals because he was happy and hopeful again when his son was actually born!"

No!

For if Zechariah's hope had been based on externals, if he had not learned anything in those 9 months of silence, then when his son John the Baptist was imprisoned and beheaded, there would be no hope left in Zechariah.

John was the herald of the Jesus of history. "Prepare ye the way of the Lord!" he said hopefully. But then what a tragic end was ahead for John! - beheaded!

The Jesus of history he had prophesied about, did actually come.

John did not see the end of Jesus.

Jesus loved without conditions, but in the end he also was executed! - crucified!

But through the action of God, Havel's hope from 'elsewhere' came into play. The Christian tradition teaches that God acted in history to have the last word and that word was resurrection from the dead for the Jesus of history. That meant for us and the whole world that there is life after this life, and in that, we all can have hope!

But let's also be clear. If you want to find hope for your life it involves a commitment to live in the present moment and to surrender outcomes to God. Here is a saying to live by: **Never surrender leadership to outcomes! Surrender outcomes to God.** This what Havel is talking about. He says that this kind of hope that can face anything is an orientation of the spirit, something as profound and native to us as our sexual orientation, a sense not that

things will turn out well, but the certainty that something makes sense **anyway!**

Moses did not enter the promised land. Neither did Martin Luther King Junior.

Abraham, the father of Ishmael and Isaac, ancestor of the modern Jew and the Arab, set out from Ur of the Chaldees, not knowing where he was going except that he was looking for a city whose builder and maker was God. A strange quest and he did not find it here on earth. Nevertheless, he set out! So did Moses. So did Martin Luther King Jnr.

The Dalai Lama, speaking to a group of colleagues who were in despair said “Do not despair. Your work will bear fruit in 700 years or so!”

Margaret Wheatley a Buddhist writes: “Can we do our work without needing to see results? Can we be content that our work might bear fruit, but not in our lifetime?”

We can if our faith is grounded in God, for Scripture tells us that GOD will ensure good outcomes even to the end of the world. Jesus said: “Lo I am with you even until the end of the world.”

This different kind of hope assures us that we are never alone, despite appearances to the contrary.

God does hear and answer prayer, not always the way we want the outcome to go at all, but the Great Presence is always with us, despite what things may seem.

Our faith talks about each of us having a guardian angel. In fact, Jesus mentions it.

Angels in Scripture are bringers of hope and joy and protect us in times of danger. Here is a saying I try to remember each day of my life: “I am divinely guided and protected.” Anyone of us can

experience Divine protection and guidance. Ask for it, believe, and watch what happens!

In 1980 Dave Carr of Bangor Maine felt that he should start a mission for the homeless and people down on their luck. However, he was a truck driver, not a pastor. He had a young family to support with nothing left over for a Drop-in Center for the homeless.

Yet the urge to do something grew stronger, especially after a man in Bangor Maine was murdered in the middle of the night and thrown over the Penobscot River Bridge. Without some kind of a safe oasis Dave thought the same sort of thing might happen again.

So, one September evening Dave began his quest to look for a location to open a coffee shop for the homeless. He started in Bangor in the evening looking at likely sites but felt that he had not found it. The time got late and at 1 am he found himself walking across the Penobscot bridge towards Brewer.

A car approached, slowed and stopped. The windows were down and one of the occupants said; "Let's throw him over!" All three men inside the car jumped out and came toward Dave.

Horrified, Dave suddenly recalled that the murder of the street person had been on this very bridge! Were these the same men? His prayer was that he could survive the icy water below and somehow swim to safety, but when he looked down, the tide had gone out and only rocks and dirt were left.

But then Dave sensed a presence near him. A warm, safe feeling flooded over him. He knew, without knowing how, that he was not alone.

Now the men were almost upon Dave. They were all three large, muscular, and leering at him. "Get him!" one shouted.

Suddenly they all stopped. They stared at Dave then looked to his right and his left. They seemed terrified. One said “Oh my God. Run, Run!!” and they all jumped back into their car and roared off. Whatever or whoever had protected Dave, he was thankful.

“Thank-you God.” he said.

He felt so exhilarated and **so full of hope** that he resumed his search late as it was! As he crossed the rest of the bridge, Danny, a friend of his, drove by and honked at him and kept going, unmindful of Dave’s narrow escape. A while later Dave came across some derelicts, but as he approached but they all fell back. One put his hands over his eyes and said “You’re shining! It hurts to look!”

Dave wasn’t sure at all about this whole experience, but the next day clarity came because he ran into his friend Danny again.

“Sorry I didn’t stop last night on the bridge but I had passengers and I could never have fit all of you in my car too.”

“All of us?” Dave asked puzzled.

“Those three huge guys walking with you?! They were the biggest people I have ever seen. One must have been at least 7 foot tall!”

Dave got the message and Hope came to Bangor in the form of a coffee house which he opened in 1986. It still runs today. And every night at least 100 homeless people find a different kind of hope, as they find shelter and safety; served up with coffee and hugs...a hope that began from...

ELSEWHERE...