

**Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> June 2020**

**Meeting as a community of hope – Hebrews 10:19-25**

**Talk by Andrew Griffiths, Prayers by Betty Friend**

Hi, my name is Andrew and thanks for downloading the talk for St John's church for Sunday 21 June. I will be reading from Hebrews 10, giving a short talk and then Sue will be reading prayers written by Betty, before we end.

We have been meeting virtually now for over three months and it can be easy to lose sight of hope – but this morning's passage and talk are all about the power of the hope we have in Christ Jesus, and how we should persevere even when times are hard.

We aren't called to persevere in our own strength, though, we have the Holy Spirit and we have one another.

Which is why it is so important that we continue to support one another in the bad and good times – that is what St John's church is all about and that is why our vision – to care, involve and build a home for everyone – is so important.

So, as we gather let us pray.

Lord, we thank you that you love us so much that you sent your Son into the World, to die for us. Lord, we thank you that your love is so powerful that death could not overcome it, and your Son rose again. And Lord, we thank you that your love is so unending that as we gather this morning, we can be certain of the hope we have for eternal life with you.

Amen

### **Hebrews 10:19-25**

<sup>19</sup> Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, <sup>20</sup> by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, <sup>21</sup> and since we have a great priest over the house of God, <sup>22</sup> let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. <sup>23</sup> Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. <sup>24</sup> And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, <sup>25</sup> not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

In 1555, the soon-to-be martyred Bartholomew Green wrote:

'When all things shall fail, love faileth never. Hope has its end, when we get that we hoped for. Faith is finished in heaven. But love endureth for ever.'

Bartholomew Green was killed because he was a Protestant in a Catholic country – thankfully we have now come to accept that diversity in the body of Christ, but in England in 1555 you could be killed for your belief, as you still can in some other countries in the world.

But Green did not lose his faith, because he knew what he was trusting in, he knew that he could be certain of his faith because he was certain that he was loved.

And as he wrote from prison, waiting on death row – when everything else fails, love will remain.

That is the core of this passage – it is a call to perseverance because we can be certain of the love of God.

The passage centres on verse 23, where it says, ‘Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.’

It is a call to be guided by our hope, because we know the character of the person who promised it – Jesus Christ.

He is faithful and he loves us.

That is the core of the message this morning – when all else fails, know that God loves you and cares for you.

This passage is both simple and really complicated.

I have to admit to having had to read it a number of times, because there are so many ‘since...therefore’ – ‘because of this thing we can know that thing and therefore, because of this we know that that is also true, therefore this means that we can know that’.

It can feel a little bit like we’re getting tied in knots.

So I thought I’d just break it down a little bit.

The first clause is this, from verse 19: because of Jesus’ sacrifice we know that we are able to enter the presence of God – the holiest of holies.

This is expressed, as in most of Hebrews, with reference to the temple – the Most High Place.

This was the centre of the temple complex, where only the High Priest was able to enter, and only on some occasions, because it was where the presence of God was, where God lived.

When God showed his presence to Moses in the burning bush, in Exodus 3, he said in verse 5 ‘do not come any closer, take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.’

God’s presence is dangerous, because it is pure and holy.

We are not pure and holy, but as Hebrews 10 verse 19 says, because of the blood of Jesus – the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross – we can enter into the presence of God.

Because of Jesus' sacrifice we can know God, because, verse 20, we now have Jesus as our High Priest.

In Judaism, the High Priest mediated for the people of Israel – our passage in Hebrews tells us that not only did Jesus die so we can enter the presence of God, he now mediates for us with God the Father.

And because of that, verse 22, we can come to God knowing that we are clean, pure and freed from our sins.

What this passage says is that:

We can come to God with certainty and with a clean conscience, because we do so not in our own strength but trusting in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

This is the gospel – and this is why we have, as it says in verse 23, a certain hope in Jesus Christ.

Our hope is not centred on ourselves, it is not a blind hope in something unseen, it is hope based and founded in the love that Jesus showed to us in dying on the cross for our sins.

We have hope because Jesus broke through all the mess and pain and suffering of this world, he tore down the curtain that separates us from God, and we can trust absolutely in him for eternity.

As Bartholomew Green wrote, as he faced his death for his faith, we hope because we know that the love of God, shown in Jesus Christ, endures through everything.

It endures through time, through suffering and most of all we know that the love of Christ endures through death – nothing in all of creation is more powerful than the love that Jesus has for you.

We know this because we have seen it in Jesus' death and resurrection.

That is the message of hope on which this passage, and indeed the whole of Christianity is founded.

But what does it mean for how we should live?

Well, verse 24 and 25, the practical outworking of this love is that we should encourage each other.

Hope is hard to maintain on our own – we might know something, but without one another we can easily lose hope.

That is why Jesus left us the Holy Spirit, as he said in Luke 14:26, 'to will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you', but also to draw us together as a people, a church, to be that encouragement to one another.

Hebrews calls us to continue to meet together – just as we have done through these strange Covid times.

We have continued to meet as a church, now through these zoom calls organised wonderfully by Team Miller.

And we have continued to meet in our homegroups, and even in social events like the quizzes (again, hat-tip to the Millers) or Knit and Stitch and other things.

We have not given up meeting together because it is hard – not just because we like one another (although I hope we do!), but because that is how we live in a community of hope.

We live in that community of hope, by loving one another, caring for one another.

As it says in Hebrews 10:24, we should ‘spur one another on toward love and good deeds’.

We should be good examples to one another and an encouragement to one another.

So how do we live out the hope of Jesus Christ – we live it out by loving and caring for each other and the world around us.

We do so by giving so much to the food bank that it now has too much!

We do so by keeping the CAP centre open through all the lockdown, providing support for people who need help.

We do so by putting on quizzes, by calling one another up, by asking after one another and helping one another out with practical support.

We live out the hope of Jesus Christ by how we love and care for one another.

We have a hope in a love that endures for ever, that is the most powerful force in the universe – and what better thing to do than to share that love with those around us.

When times are hard, let’s hold onto that hope because we know that God is faithful.

Amen.

## **Prayers**

Now Sue will lead us in our prayers which were written by Betty.

Lord we know that we are a sinful people and do not live up to your standards. There are things we have done that we should not have done; we have not done things that we should, and we have said and thought things that have been wrong. But Lord, we are sorry for our faults and ask that in your mercy you will forgive as we repent, and help us to be more like you.

Heavenly Father, we come to you at this difficult time, knowing that you are our rock and our salvation.

We pray for our world, where there is so much heartache and sorrow. For those affected by the coronavirus pandemic, especially those in countries where there is minimal healthcare.

We pray for those who are victims of conflict and terrorist attacks, thinking especially of those in Yemen, Pakistan, North Korea, and Mali.

We pray also for those who are facing famine because of the huge swarms of locusts that are spreading out from Iran and for help with the world food program to cope with peoples' needs.

Lord have your hand of protection on medics, aid workers and missionaries, and those who suffer because of their faith in you. You, Lord are their hope and we pray your mercy on the suffering. We also pray that you will soften hearts, so that those perpetrating atrocities will come to know your love and saving grace. We pray for the peace of Jerusalem.

Whilst you are a God of love, you are also a God of justice. We see bad things going on in the world, but you are the final judge. Help the churches to speak out against injustice. We know that all lives matter to you, and we pray that the Black Lives Matter campaign will not be taken over by those wishing to cause violence, and that the protests will not further the spread of covid 19.

We pray for our politicians both national and local that they will work for the good of the people and not to their own agendas. Give Christian members of parliament the courage to stand up against laws which are against your will. As we come to the end of the transition period for leaving the European Union, we pray that this will not lead to further unrest.

We pray for our community of Penge, especially those who are grieving, unemployed, and those who are struggling with finance and childcare issues. We thank you for Rachel, Lin and Gareth as they reach out to those with a burden of debt and thank you that our food bank is well stocked to cover the current needs.

We ask that you will help those businesses who are not able to open at present, and for those that are. We ask for patience for those having to queue outside shops.

We ask your blessing on those known to us who are suffering physically, mentally, financially and those suffering loneliness or abuse as a result of the lockdown.

Let us take a few moments to pray for those known to us.

As we await the appointment of a new vicar, we thank you for the work of Steve, Ian, the PCC, and others who have been keeping any necessary church business going.

Finally, Lord we pray for ourselves, that you will keep us safe and serving you in any way we can. Jesus said, "as the Father has loved me, so I will love you"; keep us loving each other.

Lord we ask these things in the precious name of Jesus. Amen.

As we finish our time of prayer, we will join in the prayer which Jesus taught us...

**Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come, your will be done,  
on earth as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins  
as we forgive those who sin against us.  
Lead us not into temptation  
but deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power,  
and the glory are yours now and for ever. Amen.**

Thank you for joining us and I will just pray to finish:

Jesus, the hope of all who trust you;

the power of all who serve you;

the wisdom of all who follow you;

the uniter of all who worship you.

Fill us with strength and boldness according to your promises,

that we might reach our needy nation, with your love, and your Hope.

We humbly acknowledge our weakness and failure,

but our eyes are fixed on you.

Fulfil your purposes and plans that your name may be honoured in our land.

In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.