

## **FOREVER HOPEFUL**

( A Sermon Synopsis by The Rev. Ernest R. D. Smart)

Scriptural references: Psalm 130 and 1 Peter 1:3-9

St. Andrew's Christian Community, Sunday, September 23, 2007

I heard last year that the newest edition of Webster's Dictionary contained over 40,000 new words. So may I ask which is your favorite? No response? Then, which is your favorite word in all of the English language?

It would not be difficult to draw up a short list at least. At the top of my list lies the word HOPE.

We use the word HOPE many times every day in ordinary ways related to weather, appointments, vacations, etc. But what is HOPE?

At a deeper level many psychiatrists and counselors will tell you that the number one problem in society today is the lack of hope, leading to a sense of hopelessness and despair through purposelessness and uncertainty. Indeed, that is what the word "despair" means – without hope.

So this morning we ask about hope. What is it? Where do I find it? How does it work?

We could turn to Omar Khayyam, of course, to the familiar words:

*The worldly hope men set their hearts upon  
Turns ashes – as it prospers; and anon,  
Like snow upon the desert's dusty face,  
Lighting a little hour or two – is gone.*

Pretty depressing, yes? Then we have something more positive from the poet, Alexander Pope:

*Hope springs eternal in the human breast;  
Man never is but always to be blessed*

With many other valiant and personal attempts to describe HOPE, the true authority on HOPE is without doubt Holy Scripture.

Hope runs like a connecting line through every one of the 66 Books of the Bible. Hope belongs to the world of practical spirituality. Hope is a gift from God. It was hope that kept the children of Israel on their long journey to the Promised Land. Our God is also a God full of Hope that all people will learn to be faithful.

The reward of such faithfulness is joy. St. Paul, in Romans 15:13, shares with us this blessing, "May the God of hope fill you with all joy

and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”

Hope therefore should be seen and understood as one of the three pillars of the Christian Faith – 1 Corinthians 13 – faith, hope, and love.

Let us grasp hold of the power and energy of such hope. Many of you will be familiar with the story of Corrie Ten Boom and the accounting of her terrible experiences in a Nazi Concentration Camp during the Second World War. It is hard for us to imagine the desperate conditions of such camps – the filth, the starvation, the disease, the harsh working conditions, the dehumanizing treatment by the S.S. guards. Read her book again, “The Hiding Place,” a reference to the secret place in her home where Jewish friends could be hidden. Corrie was arrested along with her aging father and younger sister, Betsie.

It was the message of God’s love found in Holy Scripture which gave Corrie and her sister the God-given gift of hope. Here was no pious and vague hope but a driving energy which she shared with all the other prisoners, in spite of their wretchedness. Such hope from God is limitless.

Hundreds of other examples could be given.

Hope, as a gift from God, is alive and well today. Look at the story of Habitat for Humanity, giving hope to thousands of people who yearn for a home of their own. Or look at Shepherd’s Clinic, giving hope to thousands of people who are good working people but cannot afford even basic health care. HOPE is also a major contribution to the world of healing for everyone. O that ALL might be relieved of their fears, their anxieties, their sense of hopelessness, and not least their fear of death. Hope is God’s gift to create a deep-seated confidence in the future, starting with today and forever.

As a congregation, what is it that God wants of St. Andrew’s? Like other Christian communities which take their faith seriously and joyfully, we are called upon to be PEOPLE OF HOPE. We take God’s gift of hope and we live it. We enjoy it and we share it with a world which is desperate to hear its message.

Ultimately we find our hope in Jesus Christ, the Hope of the World.

So let us, each and all, be forever hopeful. We have good reason to be.

