

Reflections on Hope and Continuity

By Andrew Gardner, Union Chapel Heritage and Outreach Worker

Through our readings today we consider in several ways faith, hope and continuity, which have sustained us since the earliest days of scripture, and in present times, and shall do for the rest of our days.

Daniel 7: 9-14



These verses give comfort and support in times of domination by successive Empires, several of which have been alluded to including Babylon, Persia, Macedonia and Constantinople. The fourth beast is thought to refer to an Empire yet to come. The vision here bears strong connectivity to the vision of John in the Revelation, notably in chapter 20: 11-12:

11 And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them.

12 And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.

So what does this tell us? That the Messiah will come, in our faith He will return. That those who oppress will be put down. That no dominant power lasts forever; that, as in the hymn 'Onward, Christian Soldiers' (which does not necessarily have to be read with military connotations) "Empires rise and wane". In other words, when we feel oppression or suffering, and sometimes we oppress ourselves internally, we



have a constant beacon of hope. The message of these verses is that power, in all its shapes and forms, great and small, will always in the end meet judgment.

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Luke 24: 44-53; Acts 1: 1-11

Luke's gospel ends with brief reference to the Ascension. One verse in fact: 51 "And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven." It poses the ultimate "What happened next?" – he has provided a drama in need of a sequel. This indeed is what he goes on to provide, beginning with an enhanced exposition of what happened at the end of the last episode. He goes on to describe a small group of deeply prayerful worshippers, much in awe of what they know – the embryo of the early church in fact, still at that time rooted in the Temple. They are instructed to spread the Good News, more correctly "God's News". Easter comes to an end with the Ascension, with the hope of a place in the world to come promised to the world – but the world of the apostles didn't know about it yet! Think how you would have felt about being given such in instruction. Luke, writing in Acts, goes on to tell us of Peter's initial fears, salved through prayer and vision, and goes on to introduce us to Paul, and the letters that follow. He provides our link of continuity from the life of Christ to the lives of the earliest churches, and Paul's window into them.

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Psalms 68: 15-20, 32-35

Let us dwell silently for a moment on verse 19: "Every day he gives us help with what we have to carry".

The things that we carry, often referred to as burdens, are often inside us. It may be that we are sad, or do not know what to do next. We may be suffering from illness, or bereavement, we may be finding employment difficult, perhaps struggling to light and heat our homes. The Psalmist's words are echoed in Isaiah 63: 9 "In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them: in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old." God will carry us AND our burdens if we lift them up to Him. We can lift them at any time, it can be as simple as breathing "help me!" We don't have to wait until Sunday to spend an hour on a pew asking for help, we can pray at any time. We can pray silently on the bus, or train, the other passengers won't even know we're doing it. We can even send a silent prayer during *Eastenders* if a moving scene happens to touch something in our real lives.



Looking at it from another angle, if we do not ask for help, it is a bit much to hope – or expect – to receive it. This was a lesson to be learned time and again through the Old Testament, and by extension, to each one of us over the course of our lives. *Through our readings today we consider in several ways faith, hope and continuity, which have sustained us since the earliest days of scripture, and in present times, and shall do for the rest of our days.*

Ephesians 1: 15-23 - Prayer for Knowledge and Understanding

Visit any theology or philosophy library, and the sheer number of biblical commentaries and histories are likely at first to make you feel swamped. It is easy to feel inundated by competing and sometimes conflicting interpretations. It is like opening Pandora's Box. What lay at the bottom of Pandora's Box? Hope. After every conflict imaginable had been released, there was hope.

What is the hope we see expressed in Ephesians? That there are abundant blessings waiting for us in Jesus; but we are required to pray, to seek them, to bring them to us. Even those we think of as 'saintly' (I use the word loosely) need prayer. We have considered prayer about ills and woes; we should also pray for the prayerful! We should pray that their wisdom grows, that the wise may grow wiser, for in them lies knowledge and encouragement. It behoves to dispute less, and to pray and listen more, for it is through consideration for others that we may be best placed to seek the Divine blessings that await.