

Hope and Happiness (Romans 8:12-25)

Second Sunday Before Lent – 8th February 2026 (10:00am)

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Matthew

Glory to you O Lord

Matthew 6:25-34

‘Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, “What will we eat?” or “What will we drink?” or “What will we wear?” For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

‘So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today’s trouble is enough for today.

Are you really happy?

What seems like a simple question has been the subject of much social and psychological research. It's a big question in these times, because individually people might say I'm happy, but when they get together in groups, they seem to generate lots of collective moaning about anything at all. We certainly don't seem to be a happy nation right now, or even a happy world.

Now if you make products that you would like to sell, offering a route to happiness is good marketing theme – *'look at these other people, they are happy, they have our product. You need our product so you can be happy too.'*

Maybe taking a holiday makes you happy, although of course you still have to come home again. **Yet, some studies suggest that you may be more or less happy depending upon where you live.** There is a set of data called the Happy Home Survey, which has been running for over ten years. I've not made a deep analysis of its methods, but I did look at some of the headline data:

- The happiest place in the UK? – Skipton in Yorkshire!
- The happiest place in the Southeast of England is Maidenhead. Haslemere isn't listed.
- Actually, the least happy place in the whole of the UK is Luton. Why? Anyone?

But I wonder what we would find if the survey were to ask about *hope* rather than happiness? What do the people of Skipton hope for? **Perhaps not much really, being very happy anyway, it seems.** Or what do the people of Luton hope for? Perhaps considerably more.

I wonder where in the UK the best balance of happiness and hope is to be found, I think that is where I would like to be.

A regular phrase of mine is to claim that hope is the most powerful of all human emotions, and that hope is perhaps the greatest expression of the gospel message. **Is it any wonder that God, who knows us so well, should appeal to our created sense of hope to address the world through his son Jesus Christ.** We can truly say that Christ was not sent to make us happy, but he did come bring us hope.

Granted, these are not quite opposite, but hope and happiness do seem to flow in quite different directions. I suggest that the first interest of happiness is – to stay happy, to maintain, to keep things much the same. Whereas hope is like a dangerous fissile material which could break out in any possible way. Hope is a great tension, a strain and stress for change – it can be rebellious, revolutionary, and even in its worse sense – violent. Hope makes a good platform for justice, charity, care and love. Happiness, I think is vastly less than all of these. **Happiness will make us defenders, whereas hope will make us missionaries and adventurers.**

Consider the strenuous language, which St Paul writes in this week's passage to the Romans.

For the creation waits with **eager longing** for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was **subjected to futility**, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be **set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom** of the glory of the children of God.

Hope for change here, is literally **pregnant** in Paul's words. He describes the fallen worldly creation as suffering the consequence of sin, yet within us is a **great hope** for the arrival of something better – something that only God can provide. **'Creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God.'**

Here then St Paul sees a world subject to its own futile enterprises, left to fend for itself, limited to its own resources and fragmented populations. **Under such delusional humanism, hope for change is limited to the same people who made it as bad as it already is.** What new goodness can come in, and from where? Perhaps new leadership? Technology? **I think this is the reason humanity seems so easily to get itself stuck in unresolvable difficulties, because it has no new solutions.**

We can ask with Paul – ‘[When will] [bondage to decay obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God?](#)’

Hope in one’s own resources is a closed system, whereas hope in God breaks out.

Like the experiences of many before me, I am watching my father slowly move into the dementia which is Alzheimer’s. Little-by-little his memory and his personality are being deleted – or so it seems. Yet, you know, the strangest thing of all is that I’ve never seen him so happy. He seems not to notice, or even care. It is as if all of life’s restless maintenance no long matters to him. He wants for nothing. It’s like he is reversing back into childhood, with the hope and promise of a life to come, not a life’s ending. **There is an echo of Christian hope found in a place you would not expect.** Hope goes well beyond the categories of normality that we like to call progress, wellbeing and happiness.

So here is Paul in prison, facing his own death, at the end of a life in which had stripped him of his previous comforts and happiness – that of living with the certainties of the Mosaic Law, as a Pharisee. Remember how upon the Damascus Road, Paul had been plunged into

the chaos of change, from which had drawn a new hope in God beyond anything he could have known in his former life. He wrote, famously, in his letter to the Philippians:

“Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.’

He could never had done that for himself, no resources of happiness could have got him there, and neither could anyone else. It required the intervention of God alone. **So, when we seek hope, we seek hope in God.**

But if total happiness in this life is what you seek, then you shall forever be kicking the can down the road. Total happiness is a game of chase you shall never win, and you shouldn’t want to either. Total happiness will almost certainly mean the deletion of your Christlike personality into some sort of painted world of **possessive vanity**. False hope in the mere trinkets and baubles of this life, will always **tease and disappoint you**. We can see it, so we think it is real. But Paul, who was struck blind for a time, knows better than to trust what tantalises his eyes.

“For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is no hope at all. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.”

But ok, we all like a bit of instant happiness. For me that is Jaffa cakes, or it's buying new tools for my workshop, or visiting cafés with Sophie. Perhaps happiness for you lies at the base of a cork, or new things, or a good scorecard. These are all fine, of course but never exclusive. **Whatever makes you happy, do not let it become your false hope. Retain in your life a more honest survey.** We know there are regions and places within our souls which only the hope of God can address – **where such hope is real hope – and that is the only route to a happiness which lasts.**

Amen