

Wheatley URC 10 May 2026

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Sermon - Hope

It can feel in our world today that hope is of short supply we only have to look around at the world situation the wars, the natural disasters, and a little closer to Home, the rising cost of fuel and the cost that follows of everything else that goes up even the worry about whether someone will get on holiday this year with the fuel prices for the aircraft. Perhaps even in our own lives there are things happening that give us little hope.

Now that I have totally depressed you I want us to turn away from a lack of hope to seeing that there is a lot of hope and our readings today from both John 14 and 1 Peter 3 offers us something that speaks more of hope more than just a feeling not a distant dream but a present power a power that will be revealed through Jesus Christ a power that shows that things can and will be better

In John's gospel we find the disciples in the state of high anxiety. Jesus have just told them he's leaving their world is crashing about them yet Jesus doesn't offer a manual on how to cope with grief. Instead, he offers them an advocate a comforter a spirit of truth the Paraclete the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit will come into the world to guide to lead to offer hope in a different way Jesus talks about not leaving them orphan he's giving them a foundation of hope, to be an orphan is to be without a name without protection without a hope and without a Home Jesus promises that even in his physical absence, we will never be abandoned. He will always be there walking alongside us.

Because he walks alongside us, Jesus comes into relationship with us and therefore we come into relationship with him and God and this is what will give us hope this community if you like of faith that will work together that will grow together but while it is true, that hope is not the absence of trouble. It's the presence of God With us.

Jesus offers a whole new avenue of relationship through the Spirit, given to the disciples as a community.

It is the Spirit who will enable them to follow the teaching, centring a Christian life on love for Jesus. The Spirit is described as a 'counsellor', but the Greek word *paraclete* relates also to the practice of offering support in a court context, for example, by witnessing to someone's goodness. And this is the 'Spirit of truth' - enabling the community of disciples to live authentically in accordance with Jesus' calling.

Before I came a minister, I worked in a respite home with people with learning difficulties. Part of my job was to be an enabler to help them to live it as independently as they could from perhaps teaching them how to make their own cup of tea to intervening in situations where they needed someone to speak on their behalf to enable them to be as full of person as they can. This is what the spirit does for us.

We see that disciples' have deep but unspoken fears (As we do) that they will be orphaned, left without protection in a hostile world. Jesus patterns a message of hope and comfort using words that have shaped his message throughout his ministry. He speaks of abiding together - that permanent relationship, He invites them to share his life (as He does us), and concludes by reminding them of the *agape-love*, which is at the heart of their hope. In 1 Peter 3, Peter is writing to a church that has its own fears. They are under persecution, they have such questions as, how should Christians live? What are the responsibilities of God's people?

Peter leads us into these reflections with a quotation from Psalm 34:12-18:

¹²Which of you desires life,
and covets many days to enjoy good?

¹³Keep your tongue from evil,
and your lips from speaking deceit.

¹⁴Depart from evil, and do good;
seek peace, and pursue it.

¹⁵The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous,
and his ears are open to their cry.

¹⁶The face of the LORD is against evildoers,
to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth.

¹⁷When the righteous cry for help, the LORD hears,
and rescues them from all their troubles.

¹⁸The LORD is near to the broken-hearted,

and saves the crushed in spirit.

The reading meditates on those verses in the form of midrash, a Jewish approach to Scripture, of reflection that aims to draw out its meaning for the present.

The quotation sets the broad context: held in God's care, we can choose to live right. Peter's midrash turns to the question, 'What happens when things go wrong?'

Peter is responding to a situation where Christians were facing persecution, especially in Rome where this letter may have been written. His directions are simple: know who deserves respect. he advises his hearers not to fear hostility but to recognise Christ's all-embracing authority.

Peter's own past meant that he was aware of how fear can lead to aggression and violence. He encourages his hearers to practice gentle respect, even towards those who abuse them recognising that this will give authentic attraction to their account of their faith and hope. In this way they can imitate Christ, who was silent before his persecutors.

Peter mentions 'the hope that is in us', he develops this by painting a picture of Christ's journey through death to life with God.

Scholars differ over the interpretation of 'the spirits held in prison'. Perhaps the point is that if even the spirits are set free through Christ's preaching, how much more are Peter's hearers' partners in Christ's journey through the death and rebirth of their baptism, which reconciles them to God?

Peter tells his hearers and then before we can explain our hope to others, we must set apart Christ as Lord in our hearts when Christ is at the centre of fears are pushed to the margins, they are made that little bit bearable. We can move forward in hope.

This hope in Jesus is not like having a magic wand that makes everything go away. It's knowing that he walks with us that however bad things may be, things will get better, things will change and all this was made possible because we don't fall apart because we have, we now have Jesus in our lives and he walks with us as he walked out of the tomb and survived the cross. It is a hope that lives inside us because we have the spirit within us.

Our reading explores ways of sharing the good news of faith and hope. 1 Peter resources its hearers to counter hostility by explaining their hope in Christ, gently and with reverence.

The Gospel reading shows Jesus supporting the disciples in their fear of losing him by giving them new reasons for hope and trust in God.

Peter encourages persecuted Christians to keep doing good, even when faced with evil. They should replace any fear with readiness to gently explain the reason for their hope in Jesus, who also suffered to bring salvation.

With the Holy Spirit as our advocate, comforter and encourager, we are strengthened to be faithful witnesses, sharing our hope in Jesus with others.

We too could do no better than to follow these examples in our world, that seems like at times things are falling apart, we need to look to Jesus, we need the world to look, to Jesus and see that there is still hope out there for us and everyone.