

Week Five (Trinity XVII)

Hope in difficult times

Lectionary readings

Esther 7:1-6, 9-10; 9:20-22
Psalm 124

James 5:13-20
Mark 9:38-50

Collect

Almighty God, you have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless till they find their rest in you: pour your love into our hearts and draw us to yourself, and so bring us at last to your heavenly city where we shall see you face to face: through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

How do we deal with our fears?

It is not clear whether the impending disaster of which the Psalmist writes in Psalm 124 is



In March 2012 the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change brought out a report on climate-related disasters. They analysed extreme weather events and concluded that the number and frequency of such disasters is going to increase. They expect our warmer world to produce more and longer heat waves and droughts as well as more frequent and intense rainfall. The wind speed of hurricanes is also likely to increase.

a particular national emergency, or perhaps some pervasive sense of uncertainty about the future. It feels like being swallowed by a huge monster (v3), or swept away by a torrent of flood water (v4). Either way, the Psalmist's trust in God is vindicated. The 'maker of heaven and earth' (v8) is 'on our side' (v1), and is to be 'blessed' (v6).

The uncertainties and fears around the possible effects of human induced climate change are very real - more so in some parts of the world than others.

The likelihood of runaway global warming, which will diminish food security, accelerate the extinction of huge numbers of species and make human life impossible in some parts of the world, raises question that go the heart of our Christian faith.

Prayer and trust

Prayer is the Christian's openness to God, God's ways and God's will, God's future. Prayer is an appropriate response to personal suffering and sickness (James 5:13) and also to natural emergency (Elijah and James 5:17). *'The prayer of the righteous is*

powerful and effective' (James 5:16) when coupled with repentance for sin (James 5:16) and trust in God ('the name of the Lord' James 5:14).

Prayer and action

Our Gospel underlines the power of the name of Jesus to confront what is evil, and to engage in works of compassion. (Mark 9:39,41). Jesus draws a contrast between '*entering the kingdom of God*' and being '*thrown into hell*'. In other words there is an eternal perspective within which we live and choose and pray and act.



Today's collect also points to that 'eternal perspective' in which we pray for God's love in our hearts and that we be drawn closer to God until we come to 'that heavenly city where we shall see you face to face'.

Hope and faith

It is in God that we find our hope in a time of uncertainty, even of impending disaster. This is the basis for our trust in God's providence and protection. This is the motivation for our prayers. Here is the foundation for Christian hope in the face of the possibilities of runaway climate change.

Hope in God motivates us to take action that can lead to transformation, for by God's power at work within us, God is able to accomplish more than we can ask or imagine. Despite the strong probability of very serious effects from global warming, for Christian despair is not an option....

Through God we hope for new life for all creation (Romans 8:19-25). Our planet, made new by the meeting of heaven and earth, will have an abiding value in the purpose of God (Revelation 21:1-5). We are called to live and work with hope in response to God's gift, and in the light of God's future: the promised coming of Christ's reign over all.

Further issues for discussion and exploration

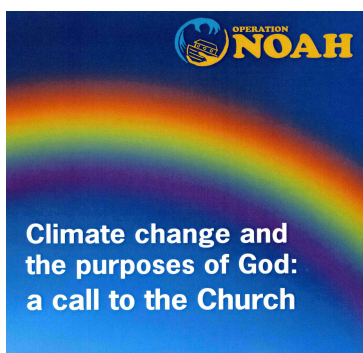
1. The story of Esther turns around her claim '*We have been sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be killed and to be annihilated*'. Her courage in the face of uncertainty, with her people scattered in a far away land after the exile, is a story rooted in the faith of God's people in God's overriding providence, and their hope of ultimate deliverance and survival.
2. '*Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray*' James 5:13.
The science is clear; we are in trouble. Who and what should we be praying for?
3. Is despair an option for Christians?
4. Does our hope in God motivate us to act?

5. Reinhold Niebuhr wrote: *'There is nothing in our Christian faith which allows us to escape the monumental decisions and destinies of history. We must contend against evil, even though we know that we are ourselves involved in the evil against which we contend... We must work for the greatest possible justice in human society and yet know that sinful self-interest will corrupt every scheme of justice which we elaborate'.*

A prayer for peace

O God, who called all life into being
The earth, sea and sky are yours
Your presence is all around us
Every atom is full of your energy
Your Spirit enlivens all who walk the earth
With her we yearn for justice to be done
For creation to be freed from bondage
For the hungry to be fed
For captives to be released
For your Kingdom of Peace to come on Earth

R Croft and J Laynesmith



resources to continue exploring its content further. <http://www.operationnoah.org/>

A closing prayer

O God, who set before us the great hope that your Kingdom shall come on earth and taught us to pray for its coming; give us grace to discern the signs of its dawning and to work for the perfect day when the whole world shall reflect your glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

(Percy Dearmer)