

Date Preached

24-Oct-2021

Date Initiated

05-Oct-2021

Where Preached

SAK

Appointed Readings

Prop 25, Yr B

" '[Y]our **faith** has made you well.' "



The theme of our stewardship season this year is family: how, as a parish, we both *are* a family ... and we *act* as a family: We care as a family ... love as a family ... hope as a family. We began by exploring the myriad ways we at St Andrew's, as family members, care for one another. Then, having heard Jesus' difficult instructions to sell everything and give the proceeds to the poor, we considered the sacrificial love—love given freely and generously, in the absence of any duty or obligation—that Our Savior calls us to show those who are outside our immediate *parish* family but, nevertheless, full members of the family of God.

This week, we turn to the final thing a family does, which is *hope*; specifically, the hope-of-*faith*—which we need to distinguish from our hope that won't rain on tomorrow's hike or that Cousin Gertrude arrives in time for the surprise party. Those hopes are more like desires or wishes. The hope-of-*faith*, however, is not a "hope *that*" ... but a "hope *in*": the faithful conviction ... the inspired assurance ... that what lies ahead is better than the present. Thus, two people fall in love and decide to become a family, in the hope of a joint life in Christ, through the Holy Spirit. And later, as a family, they may decide to welcome children into their marriage, in the hope of amplifying and perpetuating their love. And they raise those children in the hope of their happiness and fulfillment.*

** ** *

As a parish family ... as sisters and brothers of Christ, gathered in one body ... what is our "*hope in*"? On one level, we have confidence, in and through faith, that, in the end, it is God Who leads and provides. Yes, we hold stewardship seasons and run capital campaigns ... we minister to the community ... we reach out to families and proclaim the Good News, in word and deed, to all who will hear it. But as we seek, prayerfully and diligently, to accomplish these things, our hope

* As a conviction ... as an aspiration ... a family's "hope in" is always both ethereal and elusive. *Ethereal* because we cannot know or name with any particularity what this hope points to: A loving, mutually fulfilling marriage may last decades or mere months ... may be childless or child-ful ... may be rollicking or serene. And, our "hope in" is *elusive* because, unlike an accomplishment or a goal, what we hope in lies beyond any ability on our part to manufacture or attain. The active ingredient, if you will, of hope is *grace*: is reliance on what we cannot see or know or manipulate ... but are, at the same time, fully confident of. (Cf Hebrews 11:1 ("Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."))

In some ways, the Book of Job, which we've been journeying through for four weeks now, illustrates this ephemeral / elusive duality. Sober, upstanding Job's good life is thrown into chaos and suffering, and, with his interlocutors, he struggles to understand why everything has been taken away from him. What is it, he asks, about him and/or about God that could allow this to happen? In the end, however, God's response is the ultimate lesson in the hope-of-*faith*; in our "*hoping in*." God does not explain why these things have happened to Job, but instead indicates that all the world—and every creature in it (including Job)—rests within God's hands. Thus, God counsels Job, don't look for answers you can grasp, but turn to Me, alone. And, in the end, Job's fortunes are restored in multiples of what he had before.

always rests in God, alone. By tethering our parish family's mission to Christ, we are confident that He will lead us to fulfilling ... that is, a holy and grace-filled ... outcomes.

But *that* "hope in" ... a hope that stems from our *own* good works ... a hope measured on a human scale ... isn't the final hope of ... and *in* ... faith. No, our overarching "hope in" ... the hope that *constitutes* us as a parish and *binds* us as a family ... doesn't rest in things we can envision or plan or create ourselves. The reason our family has gathered here this morning ... and has been Sunday-morning-after-Sunday-morning since the 1750s ... is our *hope in Jesus*:

that, in Him, the ugly unfairness and bitter disappointment of human existence will be righted;
that, in Him, we will be freed from the shackles of human jealousy, possessiveness and prejudice;
that, in Him, all the inadequacies of our broken, sin-strewn lives will be entirely forgiven;
that, in Him, we will be released from the bondage of free will and service to self alone ... and will, at last, "delight in God's will and walk in God's ways";
that, in Him, lies an eternity of existence exactly as God created and intended us to be, rejoicing at the foot of Our Savior's throne in Heaven.

This ... *this* is the ultimate hope in Jesus that has gathered our parish family here, for more the 250 years, through all manner of revolutions, civil wars, world wars, armed conflicts, wars on terror and forever-wars: We stand as a beacon of our hope in **redemption**: All sins are forgiven, we proclaim to the world.

This ... *this* is the irrevocable hope in Jesus that has united us as generations of Kent farmers and miners and charcoal-burners and shopkeepers; of Kent constables and railroaders and teachers and mechanics: We've joined hands, lifted our voices and sung out our hope in **salvation**: Our end is in God, and *God is good*, we promise, in faith, to all who will hear.

This ... *this* is the infinite and inexplicable hope in Jessu that has sustained our parish family through depressions and booms; through disasters and miracles; through injustice and reconciliation; through exploitation and equity. Whatever the season, whatever the prevailing winds of society, St Andrew's has *stood*, ↓ planted and fixed here at the corner of Bridge and Main: our very presence a living testament to our hope in **resurrection**: Our lives shall not end but shall be perfected, in Christ, we preach,

every time that BELL is tolled ... every time that BOOK is read ...
every time that WATER is splashed ... every time that BREAD is broken ...
every time that GRASS is mowed or that CASSEROLE is served or that CLASS is taught or that TEAR of loneliness is dried, in love, or that PANG of suffering is softened, in charity.

For the single most important thing our parish family does is *exist*: In our existence ... in our coming together and being together ... in our caring for one another and showing sacrificial love to others ... in our rejection of the world's values in favor of God's ... in *all* of these things, we *hope* ... we *are* hope. We are the hope of the Father Who creates us... the hope of Christ Who saves us ... the hope of the Spirit Who sustains us. And our family's hope—our "*hope in*"—shows a weary, restless, dissatisfied, searching and *hope* ↓ *less* world the one-and-only path to consummate and eternal peace ... which is Jesus Christ.

** ** *

Our steadfast presence in and hopeful witness to the world ... our being a family united in sacred hope ... our showing the world our "hope in" and planting its seeds everywhere we can ... *this* is St Andrew's utmost and most gracious calling: the single greatest mission Jesus gives us. And so, my final invitation to you this stewardship season, is to ponder, reflect on and pray about the life-transforming **hope-in-Christ** that our parish family lives out and proclaims to all who may see or know or encounter us ... and then give as generously as you are able ... to help us sing that hope, loudly and joyfully, to a world so desperately in need of it ... and for a God Who so desperately wants to impart it.



*The Rev Douglas S Worthington
St Andrew's Parish
Kent, CT*