

CHICHESTER CATHEDRAL

Date:	26 July 2026
Service:	Eucharist, Eighth Sunday after Trinity
Preacher:	The Very Revd Canon Vanessa Baron, Treasurer

With Andy Burnham as the new Prime Minister, the North is in the news. As many of you know, my daughter works in the North East of England: to be precise, in Bishop Auckland, about ten miles south of Durham. The countryside is beautiful, but it is also an area of chronic, social deprivation. The historic sources of wealth, the coal mines, the lead mines and ship building have long since gone. A few years ago, a local girl, Fiona Hill, wrote her autobiography entitled, 'There's nothing for you here, Pet'. Words her father had said to her when she was a teenager, urging her to leave Co Durham. She did leave, studying languages at university in England, then Moscow and Harvard. She became a foreign policy advisor to three US presidents. But her book is primarily about the similarities she noted between the industrial heartlands of Russia, America and Co Durham and the way a sense of alienation and despair had given rise to populist political parties (which she regards as dangerous) resulting in President Trump being voted in as President and the rise of Reform in the old Labour heartlands of England.

Chichester may not be Bishop Auckland but, talking to people, I know how anxious many people are about changing social patterns and what the future might hold. The rising cost of living affects both the old and the young – the gloom can seem relentless.

As Christians, what is the antidote to this social anxiety and despair? How might we be different? I'm not suggesting that as Christians we should go around with an inane grin on our faces – far from it – we

are told 'to mourn with those who mourn' but faith, hope and love are the three greatest Christian virtues and today I want to look at 'Hope'. What is the hope we have as Christians and how can it change our outlook?

Writing to the young church in Rome, ch 8, St Paul said, 'What will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness – in other words poverty- or peril or the sword?' Being a Christian for the first three centuries was potentially dangerous as well as knowing the griefs and doubt we all experience. 'No' he replies – nothing will separate us from that love.

So what is it that gives us hope amidst the world's sadnesses and anxieties? Paul identifies three key grounds for hope.

1) First V 26 God has given us the Holy Spirit, 'to help us in our weakness'. Paul knows that Christians 'groan' under the suffering they bear, but reminds us that God's Holy Spirit not only helps us to pray but also intercedes for us. That is quite a thought! That God the Holy Spirit prays for us – for you and me. We are known, we are loved – the Holy Spirit intercedes for us. Keep that in mind for a moment!

2) Second, Paul trusts the good purposes of God the Father v28– if God is for us, who is against us? Paul has faith in the sovereignty of God, who has known us since before the world began; who has called us to be in Christ and to become like Christ; who has justified us (that's an image taken from the law courts – one of Paul's favourite metaphors for the atonement – the case against us has been dropped, the penalty paid – we are about to act this out as we participate in Holy Communion) and who has glorified us. That's Paul using the proleptic tense – when a verb is used in a past tense to describe a future event as if it has already happened – thereby expressing an absolute, unshakeable certainty that the event will take place. Because of what God has done for us Paul is convinced that there is a glorious future for us.

Rowan Williams has a discussion about Hope in his brilliant little book, 'Being Disciples' and points out that hope is not simply 'confidence in the future; it is confidence that past, present and future are held in' p 27 'one single gaze of love' p 26 – exactly what St Paul is saying in Romans 8 – hope rests on our relationship with God, we have hope because God has called us and known us.

3) But Third, Paul has hope because of the death and resurrection of Christ v 34. If 'God did not withhold his own Son but gave him up for all of us' there is hope.

Bishop Philip North is the Bishop of Blackburn and his diocese is twinned with the Diocese of South Sudan. As a result Philip has come to know Bishop Joseph of South Sudan well and wrote recently, His Diocese is in a warzone. Two thirds of his people are displaced and living in refugee camps. There is no functioning state apparatus, so the people turn to the church for a solution to every problem. In his homeland, the houses and schools and churches have been destroyed.....

"He serves the poorest people on the planet. But there is never the merest hint of despair to Joseph. All you ever hear from him is hope and joy and optimism for the future. And that hope is not self-generated in any way. He has hope because he believes in the Resurrection."

We are about to say the Creed together and celebrate Holy Communion. At the very heart of our faith is our conviction that, A battered, torn and wounded body, laid in a stone-cold tomb, has risen again. For those who accept that Jesus is risen, there can be no despair. Yes, there might be times of suffering and pain and self-doubt. Life may still at times be hard. But if you accept that Jesus is risen, there can never be despair. Jesus is alive again. He has been through all that torment and emerged victorious. And here is the amazing thing. You and I can share in his victory.

No wonder Paul goes on to say to the Romans, 'we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.'

Conclusion In the words of the Gospel, this is 'the treasure' the person stumbled across in the field: this is 'the pearl of great price' – this is the tiny mustard seed that grows into 'the greatest of shrubs'; the 'yeast' that leavens and transforms the batch of flour. Because of what God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit has done for us, in a difficult world we do not despair but rejoice in our hope now in this world and for our future in glory. Amen