

Reflections for Sunday May 10th 2020

*“My hope is built on nothing less,
than Jesus’ blood and righteousness”*

These are the song words that I have been constantly singing during the past couple of weeks, almost like an anthem! So, it felt right that I should share some thoughts this morning based on those words and the theme of Hope.

I hope you enjoy sharing and exploring this with me as we take time to come before God and worship him together.

Our opening prayer from Roots on the Web reminds us that although we are not able to gather together, we are still very much a community.

Lord, we come as a community of hope

Lord, we come as a community of hope
to hear your words of encouragement.

We come as a community in need
to receive your healing.

We come as a community of faith
to receive your abundance.

We come as a community ready to receive your word.

We come as your community, willing to share all we have,
in your name.

Amen.

Introduction

I often wake up with a tune in my head – so much so that I started keeping a song diary and made a note each day of what I woke up with in my head. Stand by Me has appeared more than once, Dua Lipa – Don’t Start now is one of those ear worm songs from the radio that I’ve found myself singing but there have also been a great deal of hymns too – May I never Loose the Wonder; Immanuel, O Immanuel; Lord I come to you, to name but a few! However, in the last two weeks it seems that God has placed the words of the song above firmly in my mind and in my heart. Whilst it is only the first two lines that I am continuously singing in my head, the whole song is a tremendous reminder in these uncertain times of the hope we have in Christ. I hope you know the tune so you can sing along with me. If not then please just enjoy the amazing words written by Edward Mote nearly 200 years ago.

My Hope is Built on Nothing Less

1. My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness
I dare not trust the sweetest frame
But wholly lean on Jesus' name.

*On Christ the solid Rock I stand
All other ground is sinking sand
All other ground is sinking sand*

2. When darkness hides His lovely face
I rest on His unchanging grace
In every high and stormy gale
My anchor holds within the veil
3. His oath, His covenant, His blood
Support me in the whelming flood
When all around my soul gives way
He then is all my hope and stay
4. When He shall come with trumpet sound
Oh may I then in Him be found
Dressed in His righteousness alone
Faultless to stand before the throne

I hope you don't mind if I do something a little unconventional and different from a normal service but I would like us to take each verse to reflect on.

Verse 1

1. My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness
I dare not trust the sweetest frame
But wholly lean on Jesus' name.

What powerful words the first two lines of this verse are! As I've said they have been going round my mind continuously for the past two weeks and I really feel that God has placed them there to constantly remind me and reassure me of where my Hope lies and where Hope, greater than all that is happening in the world, can be found. Pause and think on those words for a moment.

The hope we have is the hope that comes from knowing Christ and what he did upon the cross for us.

The words -"I dare not trust the sweetest frame" can be interpreted in several ways. It could be that the frame refers to our frame of mind or that the frame could be our bodies, but either way we are reminded that the things of earth, including our bodies are only temporary and that whilst we are here on earth the best thing we can do is to lean on Jesus, to trust in him.

“Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right-hand of the throne of God.”

Hebrews 12:2

PAUSE POINT –

- Take a moment to once again marvel at what God has done for us in Christ.
- Thank him for sending Jesus to die for us.
- Spend a few moments in quiet just leaning on Christ, feel him coming near to you.
- Give thanks for the times when you have leant on him this week and ask forgiveness for the times when you have tried to cope with things in your own strength.

Verse 2 & 3 – I have put these verses together as they contain similar themes.

2. When darkness hides His lovely face
I rest on His unchanging grace
In every high and stormy gale
My anchor holds within the veil
3. His oath, His covenant, His blood
Support me in the whelming flood
When all around my soul gives way
He then is all my hope and stay

These verses remind us that even in the darkest of times and when things in life feel overwhelming, God is always there; He never changes. It can seem dark at times at the moment. I know I have had times of anxiety and concern over the past few weeks. You only have to look at the awful statistics to be reminded of the devastating effects that the Covid 19 pandemic is having on people's lives. It can be easy to forget as I'm sat here in the sunshine, surrounded by beautiful countryside, that for some people this is an incredibly dark time in their lives. But when we have Christ in our lives we have that hope, even when things are hard, that we are safe and held in his hands. That can be easier to say than do at times and I just have to hope (!) that my faith is strong enough to hold on, even when I feel weak or overwhelmed by life.

I was very homesick in my first year of college at Ripon and really struggled. I decided to go and see one of the support counsellors just for a chat. Not long after sitting down she said “You're a Christian aren't you”. I have no idea how she knew – I hadn't seen her at the Christian Fellowship and I knew she was a mature student who had family to go home to on a night and so wasn't on campus. I can only assume that God prompted her in some way. Anyway, following our chat and a prayer together she continued to support me with little notes and bible verses of encouragement. One was Psalm 42. In this Psalm the writer is expressing how sometimes we can feel separated from God and we can feel overwhelmed by the storms of life (very much like Mote does in verse 2 & 3), but then, like a chorus, the psalmist reminds us throughout the Psalm that when we are feeling that way our response should be

“ Put your hope in God,
for I will yet praise him,
my Saviour and my God.”

Read Psalm 42. The version below is from the NIV Bible, but you might like to read it in a different version.

Psalm 42^{[a][b]}

For the director of music. A *maskil*^[c] of the Sons of Korah.

¹ As the deer pants for streams of water,
so my soul pants for you, my God.

² My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.
When can I go and meet with God?

³ My tears have been my food
day and night,
while people say to me all day long,
“Where is your God?”

⁴ These things I remember
as I pour out my soul:
how I used to go to the house of God
under the protection of the Mighty One^[d]
with shouts of joy and praise
among the festive throng.

⁵ Why, my soul, are you downcast?
Why so disturbed within me?
Put your hope in God,
for I will yet praise him,
my Saviour and my God.

⁶ My soul is downcast within me;
therefore I will remember you
from the land of the Jordan,
the heights of Hermon—from Mount Mizar.

⁷ Deep calls to deep
in the roar of your waterfalls;
all your waves and breakers
have swept over me.

⁸ By day the LORD directs his love,
at night his song is with me—
a prayer to the God of my life.

⁹ I say to God my Rock,
“Why have you forgotten me?
Why must I go about mourning,
oppressed by the enemy?”

¹⁰ My bones suffer mortal agony
as my foes taunt me,
saying to me all day long,
“Where is your God?”

¹¹ Why, my soul, are you downcast?
Why so disturbed within me?
Put your hope in God,
for I will yet praise him,
my Saviour and my God.

Pause Point

- Meditate on the words

“Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Saviour and my God.”

- Give Him your praise for all he has done for you. Ask him to fill your heart with His hope.

The last line of Verse two of course echoes another golden oldie song, I’m sure you can guess which one I’m thinking of – “Will your anchor hold”. You can sing or read it below now –

Will your anchor hold?

Will your anchor hold in the storms of life,
When the clouds unfold their wings of strife?
When the strong tides lift, and the cables strain,
Will your anchor drift or firm remain?

*We have an anchor that keeps the soul
Steadfast and sure while the billows roll,
Fastened to the Rock which cannot move,
Grounded firm and deep in the Saviour's love.*

Will your anchor hold in the straits of fear,
When the breakers roar and the reef is near;
While the surges rave, and the wild winds blow,
Shall the angry waves then your bark o'erflow.

Will your anchor hold in the floods of death,
When the waters cold chill your latest breath;
On the rising tide it can never fail,
While your anchor holds within the veil.

Will your eyes behold through the morning light
The city of gold and the harbour bright?
Will you anchor safe by the heavenly shore,
When life's storms are past for evermore?

Verse 4

When He shall come with trumpet sound
Oh may I then in Him be found
Dressed in His righteousness alone
Faultless to stand before the throne

The final verse of the song reminds us that our hope is eternal. Our hope is not in vain, it is not just about hoping for things to happen, the hope we have in Christ is so much deeper and greater than any hope that the world can offer; His hope is eternal. This was the reason for Christ coming to save us – that we can live with him eternally. What a hope we have!

Chorus

*On Christ the solid Rock I stand
All other ground is sinking sand*

Both the choruses of My Hope is Built and Will Your Anchor Hold talk about the solid rock on which we stand, and which cannot move. There is nothing in this life that we can be absolutely certain other than the certainty of God's love and saving grace in Christ. We can be certain that when we trust in Christ, when we hope in Him and lean on Him then we are standing on a rock, on solid ground no matter whatever else happens in our lives. God will never change, He is always there, He loves us unconditionally now and forever. This is the Hope we have and in which we can stand firm.

Pause Point

- Think for a moment of times when Christ has been the rock in your life.
- Remember that we can stand on the word of the Bible – think of some of your favourite words of scripture that have helped you to stand firm in the past.

At this time, when the future seems uncertain and we have no idea of what life will look like in a month or even a year's time, the world needs a message of Hope. It is at this point that the church and we as individuals have such an opportunity to point others to message of Good News in Christ. 1 Peter 3:15 says

“But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give reason for the hope you have.”

Take time in the coming week to think about how you would explain that Hope we have - not always easy to put into words, but perhaps something to think on!

Prayer Points

Perhaps one of the things we can suggest that people could do is listen to Christian radio - UCB (United Christian Broadcasters) Radio Station is at present running a campaign called Hope for Every Home. In our final Pause Point let's spend time in prayer and think on that idea.

- Pray for the homes and families around where you live. Pray that there will be hope in their hearts and in their homes.
- Pray for the amazing key workers who so selflessly continue to bring hope to others as they care for them.
- Pray for your family members, that they too will know the hope of Christ in their hearts
- Pray for yourself – that you will know and feel the hope of Christ deep in your heart and that in doing so can stand firm on God's amazing love and promises.

Thank you for spending time reflecting on the words of the song with me. I hope that you have enjoyed it as much as I have.

For those who have access to Youtube or are able to stream music, modern Christian artists have taken both of the songs that we have looked at today and put a modern twist on them – see what you think!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QvLxZEU02uI> - a modern version of My Hope is but on Nothing Less, titled – Cornerstone.

<https://www.music-ministry.org/hymns/will-your-anchor-hold-new-tune/> - Will your anchor hold?

Perhaps there is a song that God has placed in your heart and mind at present – keep singing!

Blessing

The words of the verse below are my prayer and hope (!) for you and me today and in the coming days.

“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit”

Romans 15:13

God bless you,

Dianne Johnson