

Greetings from St James, Normanton on Soar

Be still and aware of God's presence within and around

Beyond hope?

Looking and listening around us, you get the sense that people are overwhelmed by the challenges and turmoil that surround us. Little seems straight forward. Bob put it thus a few months ago: 'It is as though several streams are converging from different directions, with each stream becoming more troubled as it flows.' Since Bob wrote that, more streams are adding to the chaos, and unpredictability of life. I hear people in business not making plans because of the changing economic global climate, the turmoil of war - and of the unknown impact of AI – unknown even to those who developed it. So, are we, is our society, beyond hope?

Last time I prepared a piece for Stilling Prayer, I mentioned that I had found a bowl of hyacinths tucked away which had been quietly getting on with what they do...growing! And I then planted some bulbs rather late, with hope that they would do what they do. And now? Here they are, without any help from me.



I remember hearing an aid worker in Gaza being asked on radio if he had hope – his reply? A quiet and slow, 'I have to.....' Hope began to seem more than hoping for something good to happen – but to be something fundamental – something within and beyond our control. Maybe when we try to control, and to ask for our hopes to be met – there is a danger, a presumption that we know what should happen. The old phrase – 'Beware what you wish for'... came to mind. How often have we hoped for something, maybe even prayed for it, and it didn't turn out to be the answer – sometimes far from it. And often what we hadn't hoped for, turns out to have had a purpose we hadn't anticipated when we reflect.

So, when I read this by **Victor Havel (1936-2011)**, last President of Czechoslovakia and the first President of the Czech Republic; writer, poet and dissident, it gave me pause for thought.

Hope is definitely not the same thing as optimism
It is not the conviction that something will turn out well,
But the certainty the something makes sense
Regardless of how it turns out.

It made me reflect once more that when we let go of our illusions of control, hope remains our deep within, and there IS a "beyond" our hopes... but WE are never "beyond" hope. I read this poem sometime ago, and dug it out again: Emily Dickinson reminding us that hope "perches in the soul".

Hope" is the thing with feathers, Emily Dickinson

"Hope" is the thing with feathers-
That perches in the soul-
And sings the tune without the words -
And never stops – at all –

And sweetest – in the Gale – is heard –
And sore must be the storm –
That could abash the little Bird-
That kept so many warm-

I've heard it in the chilliest land-
And on the strangest Sea-
Yet – never – in Extremity
It asked a crumb – of me.

William Sieghart says about the poem:

the one thing that can never been taken away from us is hope.....it can flourish in the most barren of places. Often the call of hope is strongest in adversity. When I feel most afraid, I try to make a moment to remember this timeless poem, and hear the song of hope that perches in the soul. Always, if I sit long enough, I can hear its call guiding me through the roaring winds of my turmoil. Have a listen for the little bird. It has been there all along, singing to you, if only you could hear it.

Going into silence

For the darkness of the night enveloping the earth, Enclosing the days labour
Thanks be to you O God.
For the quiet that surrounds me and your promise of peace deep within me
And the hope of healing for my soul
Thanks be to you.
We bring not only our own weariness but the tiredness of people who struggle this night.
Hear our souls' prayers for rest, hear our hearts' plea for healing.

JP Newall Celtic Benedictions

Leaving the silence

Renew me this night in the image of your love
Renew me in the likeness of your mercy, O God.
May any refusal to forgive
That lingers with me from the day
Any bitterness of soul that hardens my heart
Be softened by your graces of the night.
Renew me in the image of your love, O God,
Renew me in the likeness of your mercy.

JP Newell Evening prayer, Celtic Benedictions