

Hope our home

I have been aware recently how, both through personal and current shared circumstances of our troubled world, can cause us to feel helpless & resigned, despondent or even despairing that anything can change. This has led me to think a great deal about the meaning of hope and how vital it is to live healthy, balanced lives and not remain in a place of darkness.

I have been helped by Steven Charleston's *Ladder to the Light*. He served as an episcopal bishop in Alaska, coming from an indigenous background and describes how in north American culture, the indigenous people built a round or square structure called a *kiva*, which had a ladder descending into a dark chamber without light apart from the opening at the top of the ladder. However, the *kiva* was not seen as a negative place, but rather a sacred place like a church or cathedral, offering the possibility of new life and new beginnings. The darkness was not something to be afraid of, but a place where growth could take place. It was not an escape from the world, a place where suffering, difficulties and pain were denied, but rather a place where the spark of faith could be renewed and ignited like a searchlight penetrating the shadows that so easily overwhelm or demobilize in such circumstances. It is a place where the light of the Holy Spirit can bless us not just as individuals but communities. Charleston writes: 'It is the moment that faith becomes a compass, for it reminds us that darkness is only a detour and never a destination.' Our faith is renewed as we look back at all that God has done in our lives and throughout history, and we are reminded that the Spirit is ever present in our lives, and will continue to be with us into the future.

When we lose hope we can end up in a very narrow and confined space, whereas faith in renewing hope, enables us to begin to ascend the ladder and climb out of the shadows even if the change we long for isn't immediate but may be a long time in coming. I am only too aware through my personal circumstances that hope is not some magic solution to life's challenges. All of us have times of testing, ongoing situations we cannot change. It becomes all too easy to be dragged down by the gravity of negativity. Each day we have to actively choose to receive hope through grace, and to be reminded that hope is for now, because the light of the Holy Spirit permeates the whole of life. This is a journey we walk together as a community because we share our struggles and are bound together through hope. Sometimes change may not even come about in our lifetime, but the light of hope is buried like a seed underground awaiting germination and growth. The indigenous people of course experienced such deep suffering and destruction, but continued to carry the hidden light of hope 'until the day of liberation would come.. and the vision of our future could never be forbidden.'

When we feel battered and hopeless, when 'my strength and my hope has perished from the Lord' (Lamentation 3:18), or like Job, it seems as if our days are 'swifter than a weaver's shuttle and spent without hope' (7:6), we need to be reminded that 'the light shines in darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.' (John 1:3-5) We are called always to make hope our home, as we receive through grace all the strengthening and blessing of the Holy Spirit within us, in order that we may become light bearers individually and corporately, and not remain confined in the darkness, but enter a wide and open space.

Leading into the silence

Hope arises from the shadows
of our ever-narrowing helplessness;
rests our leaden feet on level ground,
lifts our eyes skywards
towards the light –
light that never dims.

Even in the deep, downward spiral,
darkness cannot hold us.
No longer can deceive us.
No longer can it blind us to
the hope that binds,
unites us,
the ever-widening brightness
of the home
where we can dwell.

Helena Ibbotson

Leading from the silence

For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is not hope at all.
Who hopes for what they already have?
But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently
Romans 8:24-25