
What is Our Hope?

**A sermon by the Rev. Canon David Boyd
The Fifth Sunday in Lent – Year A**

I've been thinking about this question a lot recently.

What is our hope?

I've asked this question in my Lenten series on heaven.

The Godly Play Parents have pondered this question together as we've journeyed through Lent.

And I've posed the question to people in my care as they face death, and to their families.

What is our hope?

Most broadly, hope is the conviction that what is coming will be better than what is, that the best is still ahead.

I hope, I pray, that we are hopeful people. In each of us are many hopes. We hope our children will flourish. We hope our country will seek a more perfect union. We hope for good jobs and good friends. We hope for good lives and, ultimately, good deaths.

Indeed, we hope not only for this world, but also the next. We hope for perfect peace in paradise. We hope that our loved ones are safe in God's hands. We hope for heaven: for rest, for reunion, for release from all that has worn us down.

These are beautiful hopes. They are my hopes. And yet, when I turn to these ancient texts, I find myself continually surprised. There is always more hope than I expect.

Listen to Ezekiel. He finds himself in a vision, in a valley. A valley full of dry bones, which is to say long dead bones. Whatever flesh, whatever life, whatever particular persons these bones once were, all of it is gone. What is their hope?

God asks, "Can these bones live?"

And then it begins. Suddenly there was a noise. Rattling. Bone finding bone across the silent valley. Femur and fibula, rib and vertebrae, each one returning to where it belongs. Sinews snap. The spectacle is loud, and strange, and astonishing. Then flesh, then skin, then... breath. Ruach, that Hebrew word that carries wind and breath and Spirit all at once, ruach fills each body, each person, so suffused with spirit and life.

This is God's promise to a people in exile, a people who believe themselves finished, beyond recovery, as good as dead. And God says: I will open your graves. I will bring you up. I will put my Spirit in you, and you shall live. Not a bone forgotten. Not a breath wasted. Not a single life lost.

What is our hope?

The hope expressed in Ezekiel, in John, and throughout all of scripture, from Genesis to Revelation, is this: that death will be defeated. That God will not only see us to heaven but will even rescue us from our graves. That this world will be made new. That heaven and earth, at last, will be one.

God made this world and called it good. He loves our bones, our bodies. When Jesus stands outside the tomb of his friend, he weeps. He is troubled in spirit. Death is an affront to everything he is and everything he made. Because of his love for all of creation, God will not cede his creation to the dominion of death, saving only what is spirit. God loves more than just our souls. Through His resurrection power, God saves it all, redeeming what is good, defeating what is evil, reclaiming every life lived, every labor and every love.

The Christian hope is not that we will escape this world for a better place. The Christian hope is that on the last day, God will call out our names, put our bones back together, and fill this world with his transforming Spirit, welcoming us, at last, to the new creation, new heaven and new earth.

Do not settle for a lesser hope than this. Paradise is real, and there is more. Heavenly reunion is real, and there is more. With God, there is always more. As we anticipate Easter, as we look forward to the empty tomb, remember: God is not saving your soul and leaving the rest behind. God is saving you. Every bone, every bit of you. That is our hope.

Amen.