

The last few weeks have driven me back to a recurring question: **why is the message of the Christian faith hopeful?** That is, why is the good news of Jesus Christ really good news that provides hope for people in their daily lives? Why would suffering, struggling people turn to Christian faith to survive?

I think there are some things that we affirm that encourage hope.

First, while God may have given human beings enormous freedom, and while everything in life is not controlled by God and is often chaotic, difficult and cruel, God does have an end in mind for creation. God does have a purpose. What God has guaranteed through Christ is that the purpose that all creation has life in God will be fulfilled. There is a point to human life.

Second, as a creature made in the image of God I am worthwhile and valuable. God has given me the privilege, through my involvement in God's community, to reflect God's life in the world. No matter what people or circumstances say, I am a child of God.

Third, I can know what God desires for life, because God has revealed God's purposes through Jesus Christ, the Spirit, the witness of the Scriptures, and the voice of the church. I am not left to wander around without support and guidance.

Fourth, God does not expect me to live an isolated life, but to be part of a community that can sustain and encourage my life. The church witnesses to Jesus, and it keeps alive the story of God's relationship with the world. Even in its broken-ness and imperfection, even when it shares the racism, discrimination and exclusionary behaviour that marks the wider world, it still keeps the good news alive in some way. It is still open to the Spirit's breath drawing the tiny flame into life.

Fifth, I learn in the church the shape of the life of God's children, and gain the courage with the help of the Holy Spirit to constantly confess my failures and to begin again. There is enormous hope in the knowledge that there is always the chance for new beginnings, for fresh starts, for a life that is lived more faithfully tomorrow than it was today.

May we be a beacon of hope in the world.

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