



ST. MARK'S ON THE CAMPUS

Episcopal Church & Student Center

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The Rev. Jerrold Thompson, Rector
Sermon for All Saints' Sunday
St. Mark's on the Campus
November 4, 2007

Paul writes to the Ephesians: "I pray that . . . you may know what is the hope to which God has called you . . ." What is your deepest hope that you carry to the altar this morning as God renews communion with you?

- To pass that upcoming exam – maybe to ace it?
- That your spouse will recover from that disease she carries in her body and live another twenty years?
- Or that your brother's marriage will not splinter?
- Or is your deepest hope simply to make it through today?

Whatever your deepest hope is, is that hope based in reality?

- Have you studied for the exam?
- Is your spouse likely to live another twenty years even if a cure happens?

If you were to check the catechism in the back of the Prayer Book, you would see that the answer to the question, "What is Christian Hope?" begins with the following phrase: "Christian hope is to live with confidence in newness and fullness of life. . . ."

Hope is connected to confidence that what is hoped for will come true. We might hope for healing, and we understand that healing takes place even when someone dies. We might hope to ace the exam, and we anticipate that our accomplishment will feel good if we do; our sense of mastery in the subject will grow.

And we understand that if we *don't* get an A, we'll be disappointed, but we will nonetheless learn something valuable – and we'll live more fully into the mystery of life, which though we can never master it, we *can* come to appreciate more deeply when things don't go the way we would like. Some would say we learn even more about life and God's presence in it when things don't go our way – though few of us pray for it.

In other words, what we hope for *most* deeply does not always take the shape we expect. On the surface we might hope to ace the exam, but wanting that “A” is usually connected to larger desires about who we are and what we want our lives to be. We might hope for healing for someone we love – but that hope is connected to the much larger meaning that person has in our life.

Christians hope with confidence that whatever occurs works, or can work, to the glory of God -- thanks to *God's* power and *our* faith. Our hopes tend to be very specific, very *of the moment* in which we live: the healing of a child, reconciliation with a friend, passing a driving test!

Whether or not those very specific hopes come true, they are all rooted in a much larger hope – our hope that “all works for good for those who trust in God,” as Paul says elsewhere. While specific hopes will sometimes disappoint us, that larger hope in God will not; we can continue to live always “with confidence in newness and fullness of life,” to use those wonderful words from our catechism

Later in the catechism’s section on Christian Hope, the question is asked, “What do we mean by the resurrection of the body?”

The answer: “We mean that God will raise us from death in the fullness of our being, that we may live with Christ in the communion of the saints.”

“What is the communion of the saints?”

“The communion of saints is the whole family of God, the living and the dead, those whom we love and those whom we hurt, bound together in Christ by sacrament, prayer, and praise.”

Those whom we love and those whom we hurt – a poignant phrase -- all bound together in the one body of Christ, “the fullness of him who fills all in all,” as Paul says in the reading from Ephesians this morning.

The celebration of All Saints is one of those days of the church year when many of us live with confidence in *that* hope very specifically: that we ARE bound together in Christ with *all* the saints - living and dead. I live with confidence in the hope of again being united in some new and different way than I’m united with them now with saints who have gone before me. Like you, I think of particular saints:

- A friend from seminary named Dick.
- A former parishioner named John.
- My father-in-law, Michael.
- Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits.

Many of us carry around with us a host of heavenly saints who are very personal and whom we look forward to seeing again in a different way, whatever that might mean. We carry that hope with us day in and day out because we know that even now we remain bound to them; we might even sense their presence with us at times.

I remember after the death of my brother I was talking with my bishop if the time. We were reflecting on difficult relationships, and the death of those with whom we have those relationships, those who hurt us and those we hurt. Her father was one of those relationships for her. I recall her saying that it took a long time after his death before she had a new sense of her father's presence, of being united with him in the mystery of life that reaches beyond death.

That hope with which we live is a gift that comes to us from God, who dwells in the center of life and connects everyone and everything, binding us all as one. We hear in the catechism that we are bound by sacrament, prayer, and praise: eternal realities, gifts from God that we participate in right now, this day.

Sacrament, prayer, and praise: gifts coming from God; gifts returning to God. Our hope is rooted in those gifts from God. One of those gifts to us is baptism. Baptism is a relationship of covenant; in a few minutes we're going to renew our baptismal covenant.

God gives us newness of life in baptism and we give God back newness of life as spelled out in the questions of the baptismal covenant: We resist evil. We repent when we fail. We proclaim the good news of our hope. We seek and serve Christ in all persons. We strive for justice and peace among all people.

But our hope – that which we rest in – that which we count on most deeply – that which gives us confidence each day to live in all these ways -- our hope begins and ends not with ourselves, but with God alone.

Please stand and turn to page 292 in the Prayer Book.