

Hope that doesn't disappoint

NO HOPE LEFT

Among them was a woman who had suffered from severe bleeding for twelve years; she had spent all she had on doctors, but no one had been able to cure her. She came up in the crowd behind Jesus and touched the edge of his cloak, and her bleeding stopped...

Luke 8: 43–44

HELP?

It is really frightening to be told by a consultant, 'I'm sorry, there is nothing else we can do to help you.' Most of us would react, 'There must be something!' Hearing those words leaves us completely bereft and hopeless. Whether they relate to our own illness or someone dear and near to us. It's a death sentence.

This woman was doubly desperate. She was treated as a reject by neighbours and 'knew' God must reject her too. The bleeding made her 'unclean'. She had been earnestly seeking for a cure from the doctors for twelve years – imagine all the harsh and intrusive treatments she must have been through and the damage they would do to her sense of worth. In the process she had become completely impoverished. Not only was there nothing else to be done, she didn't have the money to pay for it anyway.

She was left with no help, and even worse, no hope.

UNTIL

Then she heard of a new healer, named Jesus. It's important to talk about Jesus. Simply hearing about him birthed something in her. Then when she learnt that Jesus was coming near, the hope began to grow.

If she had acted 'rationally' she would have stayed in the safety of her home – away from the rebukes of the religious people, away from the taunts of the children, away from the stabbing looks of the neighbours who knew her condition. 'Rationally', she could not expect this new rabbi to help her – he would not want anything to do with her because she was unclean.

But like love, hope is more than rational. This sense, however vague, that things just might be different drove her to overcome her anxieties and to touch Jesus' garment as he moved by.

Of course, it wasn't her hope that did this. It was the hope that Jesus created in her because he is the Saviour – the hope bringer.

THEN

At first she thought – 'It's worked'. Not only that the bleeding that had haunted her for all these years suddenly stopped but that she had got her cure at no cost! Relief!

Then, her worst nightmare happened. Jesus asked, 'Who touched me?' Her heart must have sunk. He must have felt the contamination of her uncleanness. She would be in dreadful trouble. Even as a normal woman she should not have touched a rabbi. People had died touching holy things improperly!

Relief – the disciples were telling him not to be silly: 'All kinds of people were touching you – it's a crowd around you!' But no, Jesus was not distracted. She had been found out and so all she could do was throw herself on his mercy.

And that is all any of us can do, throw ourselves on his mercy. This story shows us that is more than enough. God's mercy is our only hope but it is good enough for everyone and everything.

Father, thank you for the amazing courage of this woman, fuelled by her desperation and her hope. Please help all those who are desperate to reach out to Jesus today. Amen.

Hope that doesn't disappoint

And so we boast of the hope we have of sharing God's glory... endurance brings God's approval, and his approval creates hope. This hope does not disappoint us, for God has poured out his love into our hearts by means of the Holy Spirit, who is God's gift to us.

Romans 5: 2,4-5

A HOPE TO BE PROUD OF

We can be proud of many things, our children's performance at school, our prize cabbages, our football team, our latest clothes. So, here is a strange thought. Paul is proud of his hope rather than any of the stuff in his life! He means he is absolutely confident about it as well as knowing it's something really great.

He knows that he is going to share in God's glory. People were made to reflect God's glory – every human being is meant to be a little replica of God and Paul knows God is in the business of bringing that about for us as Christians. But also he knows that God is going to welcome him into his presence (another meaning of 'glory') and honour him – not because of anything Paul has done, but because God has rescued him. But most of all, this means that God will overcome our separation from him – the way we fail to reach and match his glory.

THE STAMP OF APPROVAL

Paul can be sure of all this because God's approval creates hope. We all need such affirmation – especially from the people who matter to us. When someone scores a cracking goal, we can see approval given and its motivational power. Equally we can see the impact when people receive the opposite on Dragon's Den or Strictly Come Dancing!

But imagine this: Paul knows he has God's approval – his acceptance into God's family. Most people, when difficult things happen to them, are likely to think that God's got it in for them. Paul sees the opposite: the fact that trouble comes to us as Christians is because God has accepted us to share in his tremendous work of recreation. We know that involved Jesus in a lot of suffering and it is likely to cost us too. The fact it happens shows we belong to God – and that re-enforces our hope that we are becoming more like Jesus and will be with Jesus.

SIMPLY THE BEST!

If getting hope out of all the tough things that happen to us seems to you like hanging onto the window ledge, here is something else to take on board, something truly wonderful. 'God pour[s] his love into our hearts.'

Even when it's difficult, God is showing us that he loves us, through the Holy Spirit. His love is a love which will never let us go. His love is so strong that no amount of evil, not even death can stop it. He wants to overwhelm us with the sense of just how special we are to him and how much he loves us. He doesn't measure it out in spoonfuls, he lavishes us with his love.

But there is more. Because he pours it into our hearts, his love is washing out the bitterness and hurtful memories. He is also resourcing us so we can be kinder and more generous to others. We can give it as well as receive it. Sensing this makes Paul sure of his hope.

Loving God, please help all those who are struggling or in pain to experience the healing and hope of your love flowing through their lives. Help the hope you have given me release your kindness and love to others. Amen.