

Breaking Open the Word

The Seventh Sunday of Easter
1st June, 2025



The Hope that Holds Us

A weekly reflection and
sermon, with study and
prayer guides following the
RCL Lectionary

Dennis Webster



Revised Common Lectionary
Sixth Sunday of Easter

Acts 16.16-34

Psalms 97

Revelation 22.12-14, 16, 17, 20, 21

John 17.20-26

Book of Common Prayer (1662) Collect

Introduction

Reflection

Discussion Questions

Five Days of Meditation and Prayer

O God the King of Glory,
who hast exalted thine only Son Jesus Christ
with great triumph unto thy kingdom in heaven:
We beseech thee,
leave us not comfortless;
but send to us thine Holy Ghost to comfort us,
and exalt us unto the same place
whither our Saviour Christ is gone before:
who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost
, one God, world without end.

INTRODUCTION

In the sermon, Dennis explores the profound difference between hope and optimism through biblical teachings. Drawing parallels from the world of sports, he emphasises that true hope is rooted in a trust that transcends circumstances, inspiring us to cling to faith even in the face of adversity.

Using narratives from Acts, Psalms, Revelation, and John, he illustrates various dimensions of hope—hope that liberates, reigns, invites, and unites. For instance, Paul and Silas's prayerful singing in prison exemplifies a hope that leads to freedom and salvation. At the same time,

Psalms 97 reassures believers of God's unshakeable reign despite perceived darkness around them.

Dennis further underscores that hope is an active relationship with God, where believers are invited into the light and love of Christ. He references Desmond Tutu's teachings on the power of hope in healing and reconciliation, highlighting that sharing our stories can lead to liberation.

The sermon concludes with a strong call to embrace the hope Jesus offers, who meets us in our struggles, provides for our needs, and fosters unity. The overarching message is that our hope is a divine gift, affirming that even in our darkest moments, we are never alone —

Jesus is with us in every trial, offering us hope that endures.

Prayer Prompts

- Take a moment to share any prayer requests you may have.
- Ask God to help us remember the hope that liberates us this week.
- Pray for courage to extend hope to those around us in difficult times.
- Seek God's guidance to live out the hope that unites us.

God of Creation, breathe into us, made of clay,
your gift of life so that we, made in your image
may become your eyes, ears, hands and voice.

The Hope That Holds Us

After years of umpiring football and supporting a once-great club, hope rises as the game enters the time-on period in the final quarter. Anticipation and the promise of victory fill the air. If OPSM ambassadors allow the game to unfold, the desire for victory becomes tangible.

I felt disappointed when a former AFL president suggested displaying the remaining time on both the screen and the field. This undermines the pursuit of outcome certainty: time itself. Investing in the game's spirit relies on the hope of victory. Hope lingers for a swift conclusion in sure matches, enabling supporters to catch the early tram without fear.

They exhaust their optimism and depart, wishing to evade the opposing side's chants; even in disappointment, we cling to this feeling.

A transformation awaits, whether celebratory or disappointing. It transcends optimism; it embodies hope.

Hope is not optimism.

Optimism anticipates improvement, while hope dares to sing in a prison cell, rejoice in unseen justice, and believe in a future secured by love.

Each reading today provides a vision of hope that supports us, even when the world trembles and waiting is challenging.

1. Hope That Liberates — Acts 16:16–34

In Acts, Paul and Silas are imprisoned for liberating a slave girl. Beaten and shackled, they respond not with despair but with prayer and praise. "About midnight, Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God" (v.25). They sing not because they are free but because they know the One who sets captives free.

An earthquake hits—doors fly open, chains tumble down. The jailer, expecting death, discovers grace. "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" he asks. They reply, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household" (vv.30–31). Here lies hope: freedom for the captive, salvation for the fearful.

2. Hope That Reigns — Psalm 97

"The Lord is king! Let the earth rejoice!" (v.1). Psalm 97 declares that God's rule is just and unshakable. In a world where powers rise and fall, this psalm proclaims a different reality: the Lord reigns.

Yes, "clouds and thick darkness are around him" (v.2). At times, God's justice appears delayed. Yet the psalm reassures us: "Light dawns for the righteous" (v.11). That is hope, not wishful thinking, but confidence that light will arrive because God is good.

3. Hope That Invites — Revelation 22:12–17, 20–21

"See, I am coming soon," says the risen Christ (v.12). Revelation provides a vision of renewal: a city where there is no night, no temple, and no need for a lamp, "for the Lord God will be their light" (22:5).

Then comes one of the most beautiful invitations in Scripture: "The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come.' Let everyone thirsty come. Let anyone who wishes take the water of life as a gift" (v.17). This gift is hope that calls out to the weary. You need to come.

4. Hope That Unites

— John 17:20–26

On the night before His crucifixion, Jesus prays—not only for His disciples but for us: "I ask... on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word" (v.20).

"That they may all be one... so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (v.21).

This hope is rooted in a shared sense of belonging. Jesus gives us the glory that the Father gave Him (v. 22). The hope that Jesus offers is not merely a future reality—it is a present relationship that draws us into God's love.

Desmond Tutu stated, "Hope is the ability to see that there is light despite all the darkness." He confronted oppression and helped establish the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to shed light in dark places. Tutu believed healing was possible if people had the hope and courage to share their stories.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission was restorative, allowing both victims and abusers to testify and possibly receive amnesty. The principle of Ubuntu reflects our interconnectedness, emphasising that we make each other human. This is supported by Jesus' teachings in John

8:31–32: "If you remain in my word, you are truly my disciples; you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

It conveys a spiritual message about freedom through discipleship and obedience to Christ. The power of divine truth brings freedom that ignites hope in a dark world, empowering us to sing, even in challenging times.

Conclusion:

Living by the Hope That Holds Us

So, what do we learn from these readings?

- In Philippi, hope sings in the darkness.
- In the Psalms, hope rejoices in God's rule.
- In Revelation, hope comes with an open invitation.
- In John, hope is Jesus praying for us.

This hope is a gift. It's Jesus, crucified, risen, and coming soon.

In our prisons—He sings with us.
In our fear—He meets us.

In our thirst—He offers living water.

In our division—He makes us one.

So take heart, beloved:

**The hope that holds us
will not let us go.**

from www.church.tech

HOPE

Parsing

The Greek word for "hope" is ἐλπίς (elpis). -
Transliteration: elpis - **Root Word**: ἐλπίς (elpis),

Part of Speech: Noun, Feminine

The implications of this parsing suggest that "hope" in this context is not merely a wish or desire but carries a sense of expectation and confidence in the fulfilment of God's promises.

Definitions

- 1: Hope; expectation of good, hope of eternal salvation.
- 2: Expectation, hope; a confident expectation of something good.
- 3: A joyful and confident expectation of eternal salvation.
- 4: The term denotes a strong and confident expectation, particularly in the context of salvation and divine promise.

The word "hope" occurs in the following verses in 1 Corinthians: 1 Corinthians 9:10, 1 Corinthians 13:7, and 1 Corinthians 13:13. In 1 Corinthians, Paul emphasises the importance of love, and the mention of hope in 13:13 highlights its enduring nature alongside faith and love. The nuances in these verses show that hope is foundational to the Christian experience, serving as an anchor for the soul amidst trials.

In the Pauline epistles, "hope" is used in Romans 5:2, 8:24, and Ephesians 1:18. Paul consistently uses "hope" to convey a sense of assurance in God's promises and the future glory that awaits believers. This reinforces that hope is integral to the believer's faith journey, providing strength and encouragement.

Throughout the New Testament, "hope" appears in various contexts: - Acts 23:6 (ἐλπίς) - Romans 15:13 (ἐλπίς) - Hebrews 6:19 (ἐλπίς). These usages reflect a theological understanding of hope as a vital aspect of faith, often linked to the resurrection and eternal life.

continued page 8

Discussion Questions

How does the story of Paul and Silas singing in prison (Acts 16:16–34) challenge our understanding of hope in difficult situations?

- Paul and Silas sang praises while in prison, showing hope can exist even in the darkest moments.
- Can you think of a time when you faced a challenging situation?
- How did hope or your faith play a role in how you dealt with it?

What does the declaration in Psalm 97, 'The Lord is king! Let the earth rejoice!' Teach us about trusting God's control in our lives?

- The Psalm emphasises that God's reign is just and unshakable, reminding us to have confidence in his goodness.
- How can you apply this trust in God when you feel anxious or uncertain about the future?

In Revelation 22:12–17, Jesus invites everyone to come and receive the water of life. What does this invitation mean for those who feel weary or lost?

- The passage highlights Jesus' willingness to welcome anyone who seeks hope and renewal.
- Have you ever felt the need to accept an invitation for help or support?
- How did it change your situation?

Desmond Tutu spoke about seeing light in darkness. How can we find hope in difficult times, just like the examples shared in the sermon?

- The sermon emphasises the importance of sharing stories and recognising our interconnectedness to foster hope.
- How can you share your story or support someone else to help bring hope to their situation?

Why is community and unity, as described in John 17:20–26, vital to building a lasting hope among believers?

- Jesus prayed for unity among his followers, which signifies the strength and hope found in relationships.
- How can you contribute to a sense of unity in your community, whether at school or in your neighbourhood?

The implications for readers include a call to trust in God's promises and to live in anticipation of His fulfilment.
Early Church Fathers

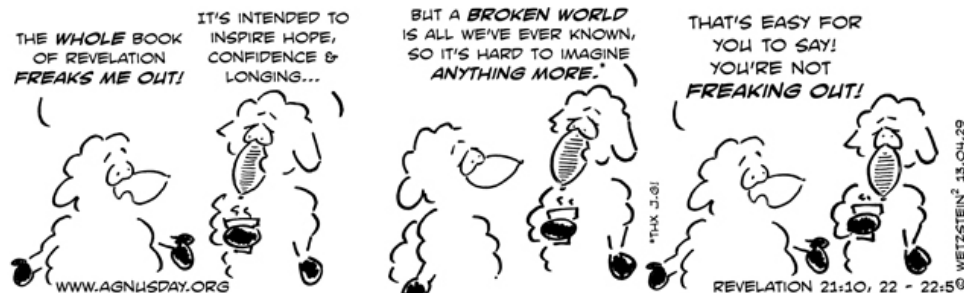
Examples from early Church Fathers include: - Augustine, City of God (ἐλπίς) - Tertullian, On Patience (ἐλπίς) - Origen, Commentary on Matthew (ἐλπίς) These writings emphasise hope as a fundamental Christian virtue, often linked to the anticipation of eternal life and the fulfilment of God's promises.

Conclusions

1. "Hope" in 1 Corinthians 13:13 signifies a confident expectation rooted in faith.
2. "Hope" throughout the New Testament emphasises its role as an anchor during trials in the believer's life.
3. This verse's connection of "hope" to love and faith highlights its enduring nature.
4. The historical and cultural contexts of "hope" in Jewish literature and classical texts enrich its understanding in the New Testament.
5. The theological implications of "hope" encourage believers to trust God's promises and live in anticipation of His fulfilment.

Additional Questions

1. How does the concept of hope in 1 Corinthians 13:13 compare to its usage in the Old Testament?
2. In what ways can understanding the cultural context of hope enhance our preaching and teaching?
3. How does the interplay between hope, faith, and love shape our understanding of Christian community?



Walking Gently on Sacred Land

5-Day Devotional

This five-day devotional will explore the sermon from this weekend's sermon in greater depth, exploring the themes of hope that liberate, reign, invite, and unite us through various scriptures.



Day 1 Acts 16:16–34

Today's reflection centres on the profound hope that emerges from unexpected circumstances. In the story of Paul and Silas, imprisoned and shackled, we witness how hope can transform despair into praise. Even in the darkness of prison, their voices lifted in prayer and worship serve as a reminder that our circumstances do not define our freedom, but by our relationship with the One who liberates us. The earthquake that followed their worship demonstrates that hope responds to faith, setting captives free and inviting others into the embrace of grace.

As we consider Paul and Silas's experience, let us remember that hope is not merely optimistic thinking; it is an active choice to trust God's presence during challenging times. Their willingness to sing and pray amidst pain illustrates a powerful faith, reminding us that even in our darkest moments, hope shines the brightest when we invoke the power of God through prayer.

- What prison or challenge can you bring to God in prayer, trusting his power to liberate?
- How can you respond in worship, even when facing difficult circumstances?
- Reflect on when you witnessed hope transform a situation or a person's life.
- Pray for the courage to express your hope through praise, even in adversity.
- Think about someone who needs hope today. Ask God how you can encourage them.

Day 2 Psalm 97

In our second day, we focus on the unshakable reign of God as depicted in Psalm 97. The beauty of this Psalm is its declaration that despite the chaos in the world, God is still seated on the throne, and his justice is perfect. The psalmist encourages us to rejoice, knowing that light will dawn for the righteous, bringing hope that

endures through every trial we may face. Integrating our trust in the sovereignty of God provides a solid foundation on which we can build our lives, finding peace even amidst turbulent circumstances.

This invitation to rejoice amidst difficulties is a vital aspect of our faith.

We are called not to ignore the realities of darkness around us but to declare God's goodness even when we feel surrounded by shadows. Embracing this perspective transforms our understanding of hope from passive to a powerful affirmation of God's promises that light will always overcome darkness.

- How can recognising God's sovereignty change your perspective on worry and fear?
- What areas of your life need the light of God's truth to shine through?
- Reflect on past situations where God's goodness brought light into darkness.
- Pray for an increased awareness of God's presence and rule in your life and community.
- Consider writing down a time when you saw God's light break through in your life.

Day 3 Revelation 22:12–17, 20–21

Today's focus is on the invitation extended in Revelation—a stunning reminder that hope is not just a future promise but an immediate gift available to all who seek it. The risen Christ assures us that he is coming soon, and we are invited to partake in the living water that sustains our souls. This invitation resonates deeply in a hollow world, reminding us that hope is accessible and life-giving.

The imagery in Revelation paints a picture of renewal and eternal connection with God. The call to come is a beautiful demonstration of God's longing for a relationship with us. It serves as a reminder that hope invites participation; it urges us to go to Him with our thirst, needs, and challenges, and he will quench them.

As we engage with this beautiful invitation, we look toward a future filled with promise and peace, assured that our needs are met in God's loving provision.

- What does it mean for you to 'come' to Jesus in your current life situation?
- How do you perceive the gift of living water offered to you?
- In what ways can you share this invitation of hope with others?
- Pray for those who feel distant from God, that they might hear the invitation to come and be refreshed.

- Ask God for opportunities to extend this invitation of hope to those around you.

Day 4 John 17:20–26

As we continue considering hope, today's scriptures highlight the heart of Jesus praying for unity among believers. This is a prayer for His disciples and for each of us who will believe through their message. This hope emphasises our shared belonging and the divine purpose of unity amidst diversity. In a world often marked by division and conflict, Jesus' prayer is a powerful reminder that our hope lies in the togetherness fostered by God's love.

Unity does not erase our individualism but invites us into a relationship that reflects God's love and glory. The hope that Jesus speaks of is alive and active, teaching us to see each other through love and grace. When we engage in community and uphold one another, we aim to embody the very prayer of our Saviour, asserting that hope thrives in the context of shared faith and love.

- What steps can you take to foster unity in your community?
- How does being part of a faith community enrich your understanding of hope?
- Reflect on a time when you experienced the love of Christ through others around you.
- Pray for unity among believers and your role in contributing to that unity.
- Consider reaching out to someone you may have differences with to find common ground.

Day 5 Philippians 1:6

As we close this devotional on hope, Philippians 1:6 reminds us that God, who began a good work in us, will complete it. Our hope rests not in our strength but in His faithfulness. Though our paths may rise and fall, God is at work in every moment. Hope is more than longing—it's trust in God's ongoing work, shaping our lives with purpose and joy.

- Where have you seen God's work at play in your life recently?
- How does the assurance of God's faithfulness influence your outlook for the future?
- What areas do you need to trust more fully in God's timing?
- Pray for deepened trust in God's work within you and in the lives of others.
- Consider journaling about ways you have seen God's faithfulness in action.

End notes and further reading

Sacra Pagina:
Paul's Press)

The Gospel of Luke (St
The Gospel of Matthew
The Gospel of John

The following authors as featured at
The Worship Cloud

www.theworshipcloud.com

N. T. Wright,
Jane Williams,
P James Woodward,
Paula Gooder
Mark Pryce,
David Perry

Rev Dr Andrew McGowan: Andrew's
Version: <https://substack.com/@abmcg>



Brabarlung Totem

This is produced on
Gunaikurnai Country and
our respects are paid to the
First Nations people
everywhere.

Prepared by Rev'd Dennis Webster, Rector of the Anglican Parish of Paynesville,
Diocese of Gippsland for personal or small group use.

Acknowledgement of use appreciated

Subscription to "www.breaking-open-the-word.org" is available.

Published every weekend, usually on Saturday evening, AEST.

Biblical Quotes are from The New Revised Standard Version - Anglicised,
which is © 1990 the National Churches of Christ, USA.

Study notes are prepared in conjunction and by subscription of www.church.tech, an AI open source for pastors. Content is modified for local use.

Images are either from public domain, theworshipcloud.org, original work or generated.



tastigr.info
is registered to D. M Webster
and all rights are reserved. © 2025
www.breaking-open-the-word.org
Email: dennis-at-stpetersbythelakeanglicanchurch.org

