

**Is God in need of a hearing aid?**

Acts 7<sup>55-end</sup>; Psalm 31<sup>1-5</sup>; 1 Peter 2<sup>2-10</sup>; John 14<sup>1-14</sup>

*Do not let your hearts be troubled. (John 14<sup>1</sup>)*

Is there ever a point in life when faith in God isn't enough?

- ✦ The Psalmist appeals to God and is so uncertain that God will hear his appeal **let me never be put to shame** and **be a strong rock, a fortress to save me** that he ends by saying **into your hands I commend my spirit**. I am quite sure that anyone who has been a Christian for any length of time will have had that experience, of praying but not being sure that we have been heard.
- ✦ The confidence that Peter expresses **you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people** that grows out of relationship with Jesus, **a stone that the builders rejected has become the very hear of the corner** can sometimes seem to be an unattainable ideal.
- ✦ Yet, when Stephen had to face the ultimate trial of his faith and was facing death by stoning as the first Christian martyr the text tells us of the vision he had - **I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God**. When he echoes the words of the Psalmist **Lord Jesus, receive my spirit** it is with the full assurance of faith and he could go on to pray in his final breath **Lord, do not hold this sin against them**.

The glory of our faith is that it holds us: we don't have to do anything to make faith a reality - God does it all and you can never fall further than the arms of God can catch you.

The words from the beginning of our Gospel for today are amongst the most profound and precious in the whole Bible. If I have the privilege of attending a person as they die I absolve them of their sin and then say these words before reciting the canticle, *Lord, now let your servant depart in peace ...* and then a blessing. Those words:

**Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me.**

In the flow of John's Gospel, Jesus is preparing his disciples for his death - he has been anointed, he has washed their feet, he has foretold his betrayal and he has given them his **new commandment** that they **love one another**, and then predicts that Peter will deny him.

At the heart of Jesus message are some key elements of Christian hope:

- ✦ **In my Fathers house are many dwelling places ... I go to prepare a place for you.** Stephen held on to this hope as he died and it is the certain that sustains all Christians as they face their own death or the death of those they love. We belong with God.
- ✦ **I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.** Faith isn't something we make up for ourselves - when that happens we have serious grounds for doubt. In this season of Easter we celebrate the death and resurrection of Jesus and that is the conviction that holds us. In our hymns today we have two statements of this: *My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus blood and righteousness* and *In Christ alone my hope is found*.
- ✦ **If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it** can appear to be difficult - many of us doubt because we think God is deaf to our prayers and that he is either deaf or unwilling to answer us. Allow me to quote the great William Barclay:  
*[Jesus] did not say that all our prayers would be granted. He said that our prayers made in his name would be granted. The test of any prayer is: can I make this prayer in the name of Jesus? ... When we pray, we must always ask: Can I honestly pray this in the name of Jesus? or, am I praying this out of my own personal desires and aims and ambitions? The prayer which can stand the test of that consideration, and the prayer which, in the end says: Thy will be done, is always answered. But the prayer which is based on self cannot expect to be heard, because it is prayed in the name of self and not in the name of Jesus.*

If we trust God beyond life we have to trust him in it. The faith that holds us is always enough.