

Progress?

[Exodus 19²⁻⁸; Psalm 100] Romans 5 1¹⁻⁸; Matthew 9³⁵⁻¹⁰

*Hope does not disappoint us.
[Romans 5⁵]*

What a strange and unusual experience I had this week: I went to the Black Horse Pub and then went to a restaurant and had a meal before returning to the Book Hotel, where I stayed for the night and then had breakfast in the restaurant. This was, of course, in Leipzig in Germany, where restrictions have been eased more than in the UK. It is an experience I hope we will all be able to share in in due course! I am now paying for it with 14 days of quarantine!

Paul gives us a fascinating sequence in Romans when he expands what he means when he says, **since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand.**

He reminds us that **we boast in our hope of sharing in the glory of God** but we are aware that the glory of God is seen in both the death and resurrection of Jesus. To share in such glory is to share in suffering. Suffering is something that is positive because **suffering → endurance → character → hope!** Many in the world are hopeless because they can't bring themselves to move beyond suffering.

Hope is a powerful thing. From the Readings today hope is expressed as a two-way relationship with God:

- ✘ **Suffering - While we were still sinners Christ died for us.** That is the basis of any hope that we could have. The evil of slavery and its effect on society has been in the news. In the New testament 'slavery to sin' is a common metaphor and the thing about slavery is that you cannot free yourself from it. Freedom from slavery – that second and more potent Exodus – is achieved when **while we were still sinners Christ died for us.**
- ✘ **Endurance - Ask the Lord to send out labourers into his harvest.** A commission – we heard it last week and we will go on hearing it! Too many of us focus on what we are freed from rather than what we are

freed for! If we have found hope, we are surely bound to share that hope with others.

- ✘ **Character - Cure the sick; raise the dead; cleanse the lepers; cast out demons.** How are you doing with that job description of a Christian to whom Jesus has given authority? It may not be that we achieve the miracles, but as Christians we are expected to get involved with those who need it – this demonstrates how God's generous character overtakes our more egotistical character.
- ✘ **Hope - The kingdom of heaven has come near.** When you look at the list of the Apostles chosen, trained and sent by Jesus, you encounter one of the most dysfunctional group of human beings possible. They shared the hope that was theirs in Christ and so the community of hope grew: those who live by kingdom values.

How easily we get trapped in suffering and don't progress through the stages to end up somewhere more positive: **suffering → endurance → character → hope!**

Hope looks forward in faith and back with certainty!