

## **Belonging over Genes!**

[Isaiah 44<sup>6-8</sup>; Psalm 86<sup>11-end</sup>] Romans 8<sup>12-25</sup>; Matthew 13<sup>24-30,36-43</sup>

*Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? [Romans 8<sup>24</sup>]*

I grew up knowing how important it was, how privileged I was, to be Robert Stephen: it was a name that had belonged to my Great-great-grandfather, my Great-Grandfather, my father and the to me; it was given to my oldest son who, in turn gave it to his son. But that name alone wasn't enough for me to be valued as a son. The last time I saw my father before his final illness he pulled his rings off his finger (including a signet ring passed down the generations – now with my son) because he feared I wouldn't get them when he died. He was distressed that his second wife's rings were removed from her fingers while she was in her coffin, very much against his wishes. It was an honour to officiate at his funeral (because every other cleric in my home town was on holiday) but when the Will was read, I wasn't named and I didn't receive any legacy (and neither did my younger sister). I don't say this looking for sympathy and nor is it a form of therapy. I mention it to highlight the simple fact that being accepted is more important than genetics, which is Paul's point as Romans 8 progresses.

However hard, or complicator or confused our lives may be, Paul says, **I consider the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to.** We are people who look forward in hope:

- ✘ We are well aware that, as with the Parable of the Weeds, this life doesn't have the clear divisions between the good and the bad; the helpful and the harmful; the things of God and the things of the devil. Jesus tells us that this confusion will exist until the end of time, **the harvest**, and then things will be sorted out. I am aware that there is no satisfactory short-term answer to the question, *why do bad things happen to good people?*, but take assurance from that promise made to Abraham, **Shall not the judge of all the earth do what is just?** [Gen 18:25]

It is a threat to the bad and an assurance to the good when Jesus says that at the division sinners and evildoers **will [be thrown] into the**

**furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth** – and we are grateful to the Revd Dr Ian Paisley for his assurance to the toothless woman that *teeth will be provided!*

- ✘ Again, looking to the future, when the struggles we have not **to live according to the flesh** are over, that the promise of the **Spirit bearing witness that we are children of God** becomes reality rather than hope.

Paul points out that we aren't alone in that frustration that the promise isn't reality – **for the creation waits with eager longing** for when **creation will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.** We all had a glimpse of what could be at the beginning of the lock-down and saw and felt the improvement in air quality with fewer destructive agents in use.

We may very well **groan inwardly while we wait for adoption** and **hope** that our full belonging becomes present reality, but it is a hope that is worth hanging on to. I am always reminded of Peter's words, **Lord, to whom shall we go, you have the words of eternal life** [John 6:68].

**Hope** isn't just aspiration – it is something that defines us as we look beyond what is to what will be. All human frustrations and disappointments will be set aside when we are with God and we know we are accepted and that we belong.