



*In his Third Holy Week lecture at Canterbury Cathedral, Archbishop Justin reflects on hope and the love of God. Read an abridged version of the talk below:*

In my first two talks on Monday and Tuesday, I sought to relate optimism and despair to first, the events of Palm Sunday's entry into Jerusalem, and second to Gethsemane and the arrest, trial and execution of Jesus. And in both cases, there were a number of ideas that I was making. The first one, to quote a neuroscientist at Imperial College London, "Don't forget the body."

We are not just thinkers, or those who just pray, spiritual people who are disconnected from the body. At its most banal, severe toothache ruins prayer. A cold makes one tired. Being too cold or too hot impacts concentration. In all and every circumstance, what the brain is doing physiologically affects the mood, expectations and responses one has.

I am on antidepressants. They work very well. They restore me to Eeyore status from something much worse. As the psychiatrist I see tells me, the aim is not to make me so laid back that I'm horizontal but just to settle things enough that I react like an average sort of human being. I'm sad when things are sad and happy when they're happy, and so on and so forth.

We feel optimistic when things go right for us. In the days when I was in the financial markets working for an oil company, you would see that a clever bond dealer or a foreign exchange dealer in the international capital markets would, on the whole over the year, make money. They followed a number of general principles which they built up, through often bitter experiences like, 'Take your profits and don't chase your losses.' They would stick to the limits of financial exposure that sensible management imposes. They recognised their humanity, and they didn't panic when they went wrong. They would have studied the history of the markets or preferably lived some of it so that they knew the feelings of a sharp decline, as well as of a steady increase in the markets. They held things in their context.

My wife Caroline's dad was on the London Stock Exchange. He joined in 1936 as, what they called, a Button Boy, carrying messages around. And he retired in 2007 or something like that. He was there for about 71 years.

And I remember one of his colleagues saying the thing about Douglas is he had quite a long view. During one downturn in the market, a person who was on the desk next to him said, "Douglas, this is awful" and he said, "Yes, it's quite difficult but it's not nearly as bad as 1937." A long view gives you a sense of perspective. When trouble comes, an experienced dealer will remain calm despite the pressure and the extra adrenaline that is pouring through them. They'll neither become too cautious nor too bold.

By contrast, the bad dealer or the inexperienced knows no history, sees no history, and presumes it's different this time. It's the great phrase in the market. "You need to understand" they'd say when they came to try and sell me some new-fangled product. "It's different this time." I didn't believe a word of it.

Imbued with a deep sense of personal superiority, the bad dealer overshoots limits and when things go wrong, they try to double down or even to cover up their losses. That's when banks go bust. The aim of military training is to get the body to react automatically in appropriate ways, adapting well and being confident that colleagues will adapt well.

So then, are optimism and despair merely psychological responses to physiological actions in the body? Are they manageable with weapons or drugs? And can they be dealt with by training? Or is there a greater force or power so far beyond these reasons for what we are and who we are? Is this greater force, one that explains and sets our identity and transforms our worldview so that our dignity and worth and eternal fate are no longer enslaved to our bodies? Or even to our circumstances, or even more to our behaviours? Those may still cause things to happen.

But is what we are deep down, what we really are, in slavery to them? The Christian answer, the answer of the Bible in its accounts of the resurrection and what came next, the testimony of the apostles and of Christians ever since is to say, "Yes, there is a greater power, a deeper force that knows who we really are."

Let me give you an example, again from my own experience seven years ago. In February of 2016, I remember the year very well because it was during the referendum campaign. In February of 2016, a journalist came to see me. He's now in the House of Lords. And he said to me, "I was at dinner with someone last night, and they said that their late husband was your real father." And I said, "Come on, don't be absurd! I'd know something like that!" He said, "No. I've looked at photographs and you look very like him." So, he showed me the photographs and I said, "I don't see any similarity at all."

So, we had a bit of to-ing and fro-ing. I'd known him for a very long time. And I said, "Okay, let's prove it. We'll do a DNA test. And then we can forget about it. You can buy me dinner, by the way." So, he took a swab and off he went. And a few weeks went by. And it was the Wednesday of Holy Week that year as it happens, I remember it very clearly, it was my year where I'm not at the Cathedral but in a Deanery and doing a Deanery mission.

And I was doing an event with a youth group and it was noisy, to put it mildly, and rumbustious. And I felt my phone vibrate and I looked at it and saw that it was a text from the journalist. And I just couldn't resist it, to be honest. So, I looked and it said, "There is a 99.997% chance that Anthony Montague Brown is your father. And no chance at all, that the person you thought was your father, Gavin Welby, is your father." So, I thought, "Okay, fine," and I went back to the youth group.

The following week, they were very kind, and they said they'd give me two weeks before they published it. So, the following week I met my Communications Director at Lambeth Palace and explained, and they said, "Well, how do you feel?" which was nice of them. And I said, "It makes no difference to me. I mean, God knows my DNA. And God knows who I really am." I also said, "I don't know what we're going to say to the press," and she said, "You've just said it." And so, that's what we said. And people said, "You're very calm." And I thought, "No, I'm not." But it was quite reassuring because I sort of thought, God knows all the things that I don't know about myself.

The foundation of Christian faith is not a change of circumstances, which means we'll go to heaven and have a trouble-free life. I'm sure one or two parish priests have often asked people, "Why do you want to get your child baptised?" And they respond, "Well, we want to make sure he has a good life," and you think, "Well, it's not a divine insurance policy." Nor is Christianity a moral code that will ensure the world is a better place. Nor yet is the Church a mutual help society. It's lots of things but that's not basically its identity. Nor, surprisingly, is it that we can worship God and know that we belong to Him. All these things are good, even wonderful and nearly miraculous, but they're not the foundation of our Christian

faith. The foundation is that God chose of His own free will to love us and to hold on to us, however much we fail.

Someone who died a few years ago, a bishop of great and profound faith, developed Alzheimer's in his later years and couldn't remember his wife or his children, let alone anything about God. Does that mean that he's no longer a Christian because he can't consciously accept the love of God? Of course not. Do we think God's that pathetic? He's held by the free love of God that reaches out and clings to us and holds us. Holds to us however much we fail or forget or stray.

More than that, God opens the way for us to choose good and evil. He doesn't control us. He gives us space. And to choose good and evil, life and death, and to do so in response to the life and death and resurrection and ascension of Jesus. God calls us by name, each of us individually. In whatever way, we're capable of. And for someone at a L'Arche community with severe learning difficulties, that will be very different to most of us here. If we answer in whatever way that God knows, "Yes."

And if we surrender our lives to God, God further promises that his love will last forever. He will bring us blessing amidst suffering and struggle. But most of all, that we are entirely safe in his hands. "No force in heaven or Earth or under the Earth," (it comes from the end of Romans 8 and Saint Paul) "is capable of tearing us from God's hands. No foreseeing those seemingly unconquerable tendencies to optimism or despair, even our own choices to go our own way, even our predilection for making choices for ourselves, putting me, ourselves at the centre of all things and not God. Those cannot tear us from his hand."

To follow this call is to live out of certain 'Givens' given by God. Part of it is not to choose to make our own future, but in whatever way is appropriate to each of us and capable for each of us. And again, I remember the difficulties that people will have if they have learning difficulties, intense learning difficulties or other disabilities or mental illness or physical illness. But to choose, not to make our own futures, but to accept His call and service.

I've sat in a hospice having just taken the wedding of a man and his long-term girlfriend on the very verge of his death. And seen him put his life in the hands of God. Is that too late? Does God say, "Sorry. Scales are too far the other way."? Of course not. This is God whose love is infinitely more than anything we can imagine.

On Maundy Thursday we will remember how Jesus washed his disciples' feet, Judas and Peter included. We will act it out. Of course, we all have sins, but they are paid for on the cross as we remember on Good Friday. And we learn to accept that call and that faithfulness to the call of God which is both individual and collective. As God loves each one of us, so God loves the church. The fellowship of all belief was everywhere at one time and everywhere in all times. On that foundation of His faithfulness, of God's faithfulness, God builds a reality for our lives and gives a collective life to the church that is neither dependent on our optimism or despair. Both of those are part of all of us. That is hope.

Hopeful Christian thinking is not a probabilistic calculation. I hope my iPad will go on working. I was going to use a different illustration, but that seems appropriate. I was going to say I hope we have good weather for the Coronation. But hoping, in the Bible, in Christian thinking, is the certain expectation of God's action now and in the future. Actually, we can't see yet. Edward Moat wrote a hymn, which puts it perfectly. It was written in the 1830s. "My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness. I dare not trust the sweetest frame that wholly lean

on Jesus." Or another Lenten hymn. "Nothing in my hands I bring. Simply to your cross, I cling. From Rock of Ages, cleft for me."

In this hope, a hope that depends not to the slightest degree on us, but entirely on God through Jesus Christ, we find the explanation of the individual and collective radical revolution that is the eternal sign of the presence of God's spirit in God's church, working for the blessing of the world by God. For that is what the church is about.

We're there to be a blessing to the world, as Abraham was called to be a blessing to the world. We're there to bless the world with the sight and sign and experience of the reality of the faithful, unchanging love of God which Jesus showed so perfectly in His incarnation. And blessing, of course, in the Bible is not just a nice word. It includes themes of judgement. But a judgement that rests on all our sins being paid for by Jesus. It's a word of transformation and power.

Hope is not an emotion. It is a reliance on an objective reality found in the resurrection on Easter Sunday. God is faithful, and not even death and sin are stronger than God's faithfulness. I was very struck when Richard was talking on Tuesday that he said, "How often you need someone alongside you when there's despair?" Someone came up to me afterwards who was in great distress and said, "I've just realised I can't go through this time alone."

The disciples in the upper room when they see Jesus, are captured by hope founded on love. At Pentecost, that hope makes a down payment on the future of the fulfilment of all things, and for each of us, by filling us with the Holy Spirit and creating the church which is those who have received the spirit of God and live by the spirit of God. And hope then becomes a lived reality, not for each of us at all times, but for all of us together at all times, carrying those who are hobbling, who've fallen.

Paul in Romans chapter 5, verse 5, says, "Hope does not disappoint us because the love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, who is given to us". In Peter chapter one, verse 3, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. By His great mercy, He's given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." Hope is the mark of genuine Christian faith at all times.

I visited South Sudan in February with Pope Francis and the Moderator of the Church of Scotland, Iain Greenshields, in order to urge the furtherance of the Peace Plan. We spoke to crowds of over 100,000, some of whom had walked for more than seven days to get to the capital Juba. Probably to see the Pope if I'm honest. Yes, they longed for reassurance, but they came to find hope. And what made them think hope could be found? Because through nine years of civil war, massacre, refugee hunting, massacre again, atrocities committed, they had held on to God and they had found between them, they had hope.

Years and years ago when our eldest child died, in some wonderful way God gave us strength and held us in hope. A year later, bit more than a year, when our second was seriously ill and had to go for neurosurgery (what the surgeon called a perfectly simple bit of infant neurosurgery, which, if you're not a neurosurgeon, doesn't sound perfectly simple at all) we felt the absence of God. Well, at least I did. I think we both did. Where was the hope then? The hope was all around us in the church, and they picked us up and carried us. That is why there's always hope because the hope is the faithfulness of God through the whole church to the whole church. From the story of Abraham, we see that hope matters because it does not depend on us, it depends on God.

From the story of Abraham onwards, the nature of God's faithfulness calls for lives that say, "Into your hands, O Lord, I commit my spirit."

Abraham had left everything to follow God's command. The years go by and he still has no children. He protests to God. He and Sarah seek to fix things themselves by conceiving a child through her slave girl. The child is Ishmael and is looked after by God, as is his mother.

But God sticks to his plan, surprisingly not Abraham's. He waits so long that when in Genesis 16 he turns up in Chapter 18 and announces there's going to be a child, Sarah just laughs. And God replies, "Why do you laugh? Is anything impossible for God?" And she answers, "Oh, I did not laugh." And God says, "Yes, you did." Sounds like a real family conversation, doesn't it? And Isaac comes. And from him, Jacob, that scoundrel. And from him the 12 Tribes. And from them, eventually Jesus. And from Him, us. And indeed, today, Abraham's children are beyond counting and are a blessing in the world.

To the Exiles outside Babylon, first Isaiah in Chapter 40 forwards, then Ezekiel, proclaim hope. Not because of them, but because of the greatness and faithfulness of God. And it's fulfilled, though not for some centuries. Today, the church (I don't just mean the Church of England, I mean the global church) also is called to speak of hope and embody hope. That means that we do not calculate success entirely by numbers or even by our effect on society. But we are first and foremost faithful to God as best we can. That will not always be successful in terms that humans measure success.

In many countries, the cost of faithfulness to God is persecution and death. But doing what God says in the way God says it, which incidentally is with gentleness and love, expresses not that we are optimistic that things will go well, but that our hope rests on God. And on declaring, in human words, a truth that the world can be better for the poorest, the exile, the hungry, the refugee. The reality additionally, of course, is that churches that love God and love people, do grow. Sometimes quite a lot, really.

If our hope rests on our own effectiveness, we're starting with a wrong understanding as much as the disciples on Palm Sunday. And the next personal or institutional Gethsemane will bring us to silent and ineffective despair. And in ordinary life, we will be cast down, as a normal part of life, but not destroyed. We will suffer. But God will hold us even when we fall and fail.

That is the extraordinary good news of this week. I cannot survive unless I come back to the faithfulness of Christ. Optimism is built on sand. But stronger and surer than them all, is the continuous presence in the body of Christ holding out the wounded, expressing the hope of the love of God. Clinging to that future where that hope, as Peter puts it, is an inheritance in heaven for us. And clinging to and proclaiming the infallible, unchanging, sweeping, endless depths of the love of God in which, often despite ourselves, we are held by His faithful hand in the certainty of hope.

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