



**Christians are called to live in hope not fear, the Archbishop of Canterbury said in this talk at HTB Focus in Camber Sands on Monday.**

Too much of our time is spent on fears and apprehensions. Fear is the weapon which the devil uses against the church to turn us inwards, against one another, away from a world in need. It may be fear of Islam, or fear of another group in the church. It may be fear in our own lives, from debt, from sin, from hidden weaknesses. It may be fear for those we love the most, or even of those who should love us the most. It may come from a million other things.

Yet at the greatest crisis of his life – in fact of all history; a crisis making what we face look like a small blip – Jesus in John 15 does not speak of fear, or address fear, but of hope, holiness, love and service. The opposite of fear is hope (which in the New Testament means 'certain and confident expectation'), and this is a time of hope, because Jesus Christ is risen from the dead. We Christians are called to be a people of holy, witnessing hope. As Christians we are least what we could be when there is fear, and most what we should be when there is hope.

It is easy to look at the church and at the world and to despair. There is much temptation to do that. We must not kid ourselves, there are huge dangers, deep concerns in every direction. But our response must not be fear, but hope in Christ. Absolute realism, but hope in Christ. We know the destination of our lives if we belong to Christ, we will be with him forever; we shall have his eternal life in us. So far so good, but the problem with journeys is not the ultimate destination but the road to get there.

In Canterbury earlier this year I went out in the car to a shop. On the way back, 300 metres from our house, I saw a diversion sign. I followed it and it took us straight down the busiest pedestrianised street, at the height of shopping on the weekend. I was wearing my dog collar, and trying all I could not to look like the Archbishop of Canterbury. My passenger was clearly wondering if hiding in the boot was an answer. The diversion continued taking us into a neat circle back to the same street, just in case someone had not seen me the first time and one ticket from the police was not enough.

The reason, of course, was students having fun with diversion signs. I had a sense of humour failure, I confess. The issue was not the destination, I could see it almost the whole time. It was the route to get there.

The fact that Jesus is risen from the dead is now beyond doubt. But what is the route we follow to get to our eternal destination? The answer is very simple: we are called to live as the holy people of God. Holiness: availability, ready, reconciled, equipped, holding nothing back. The route we are to travel with the risen Jesus is one of holiness.

For many of us the use of that word will cause our hearts to sink. Because almost all of us know that holiness sounds grim. It's a good idea in theory, but not when there is so much to enjoy, and none of us feel holy. Whenever someone uses the word, I remember my sins and failings. But holiness is infectious – when you meet someone with it you tend to be able to catch it. It is beautiful. Holy people fill our hearts with joy.



When I was on the verge of becoming a Christian my biggest issues were not about the truth of Jesus Christ – there was ample evidence for that. The biggest issue was that he would spoil my life. I wanted to be successful, go to lots of parties, be relatively unconstrained by issues of outdated morality (as I saw it). I did not want an already active conscience burdened further with a bunch of rules about what I should and should not do.

How wrong that was! As we know being a Christian is not first about rules or dogma, but it is first about surrendering authority in one's life to the one who is the truth of all things, Jesus Christ, and finding that he takes command with joy and delight, with hope and purpose. Christianity is above all a relationship with the risen Lord Jesus Christ. Holiness is at its heart about that relationship being alive and vigorous, about being at home with Jesus.

The church that is visibly at home with Jesus changes the world. And one of the reasons that HTB has had and does have such a global impact is that it is visibly at home with Jesus. If you hear nothing else this evening, hear this: "Thank you for what you do, especially to Nicky and his colleagues, but to all of you, thank you, thank you, thank you."

Which takes us back to John 15.

The situation is dire in John 15. The disciples are terrified, and confused. The only person on top of things is Jesus.

First he tells them to abide in him, to be people who are clearly at home with him (John 15:4). The word for abide is the one that the two disciples use when they approach him in John 1 and ask, "Where are you staying/living?"

His promise is that abiding inevitably results in fruit. Jean Vanier, founder of L'Arche, says in his marvellous commentary on John's gospel: "The fruit is the life we are called to give to others. But it is not just we who give life, nor is it just Jesus, it is we and Jesus." That is being at home with Jesus. The vine branch does not struggle to produce fruit, it does so because it is part of the vine. Being visibly at home with Jesus:

- starts with spending time with him, reading bible daily (are you doing that?),
- prayer,
- retreat, perhaps a weekend once a year for personal prayer,
- silence, contemplation of Christ, go to the 24/7 prayer tent,
- fasting, from food for a day, or from another pleasure the absence of which reminds us to look to Christ,
- allowing the Spirit to challenge all our assumptions and comforts, to make us into Christian people, not worldly people with a Christian hobby.

Jesus must get the best of our time and energy and be allowed to change us beyond all recognition. I know that when the basic spiritual disciplines go, so does the joy of Christ.

Secondly in John 15:6, Jesus gives a warning. He knows the way we are drawn into tasks and structures, organisation and method. No method replaces being at home with Jesus. When it does there is no fruit. Reconciliation with God through Jesus is the gospel, it is the heart and centre of our lives, and substitutes do not bear fruit. If there is no fruit, the branches are burned. The quality of our Christian lives matters very seriously to God.

This strikes at the heart of cultural Christianity, whatever our culture. It is the Christianity that says "the God I believe in would do x or hates y" when the reality is the God who exists, not the one I make up (RT Kendall spoke of that this morning, brilliantly as always). It is the Christianity that says "but I have always thought that" or, "that's just the way I am". It is the Christianity that takes what we have had as normal because we are surrounded by it. It is the Christianity that followed the Pharisees; that asked for the Inquisition; that condemns people for who they are or are not; that prefers comfort to challenge.

And I can point the finger at myself, and do, regularly. It is my Christianity when I become accustomed to being Archbishop of Canterbury; think having this role is normal and justifiable; take for granted that I am permitted to speak to you; that I am in the same space as Nicky, or RT Kendall, or so many other real heroes of mine. If I am more focussed on tasks and objectives and strategy than loving my enemies, being with the poor, listening to the marginalised, washing feet, I bear no fruit. Fruitlessness is consequence of the Christianity of complacency that comes with visible success, or of elegant decline when facing failure. And it suffers the judgement of God. Jackie Pullinger once said at HTB, "God wants those with soft hearts and hard feet, too many of us are the other way round."

The antidote to such Christianity is the work of the Spirit in each of us, and at the end of this evening I pray that many will come forward to seek to be royally shaken by the Spirit, to find afresh that they are most at home when they are with Jesus.

Those who are at home with Jesus dance to a different tune, the tune of holiness. Whether it is how you handle money, sex or power, or how you relate to people, it is different. I have spoken before about my Spiritual Director, Pere Nicolas Buttet. When I meet him I hear the song of the Spirit, and am called back to Jesus. To be Archbishop of Canterbury is nothing; to be at home with Jesus is all and everything for ever.

So what is holiness like?

It is seen in love and unity (John 15:12). The most basic cost of discipleship is loving one another even when we disagree, loving as Jesus loves us, washing feet as he did to Judas. It is the biggest sign of the reality of God; it is inexplicable unless God exists. It convinces the world of the truth of Jesus.

Nicky was kind enough to invite me to be at the leaders' conference at the Albert Hall and the Apollo in May. He interviewed Cardinal Vincent Nichols, and then the two of us together. It was a wonderful moment for me. Nicky asked a question about how we were so evidently friends. Cardinal Vincent said at once, "Well, I suppose we trust each other." Common or garden answer really, except it would have been seen as a miracle at most times since the Reformation in the 16th century.

There is a fig tree at Lambeth Palace planted with a cutting from the Vatican Garden in 1556 by the last Roman Catholic Archbishop of Canterbury, Cardinal Pole, to celebrate burning Cranmer, his Anglican predecessor. And there we were (the fig tree still fruits, by the way) together on a stage in the Albert Hall. At the end of the interview the whole place stood and cheered – not us I am sure, but the reality of unity.

We disagree profoundly on many things, but we love. That love must overcome our differences on issues like human sexuality – so that we may disagree, but we love.

Love must overcome the historic divides of the church so that we show our world the presence of Christ, not the competition of institutions. It must live out the reality that in Christ race, nation, gender, class are nothing. That is a great change, even today.

Last week Pastor Agu [Irukwu], the wonderful Agu, came to see me with the General Overseer of his church, [Pastor Enoch] Adeboye. Agu is a man evidently at home with Jesus. The General Overseer and I spoke and prayed for a while, and we agreed on some things, not others. But one thing I could say to him was that he is not competition; that the more he succeeds in winning people to Jesus in the UK the better it is; that the Church of England, strangely, will flourish when it seeks the glory of God, not its own flourishing.

Whatever part of the church people come from, we are called to love and unity. Alpha has shown that so clearly. It has been your gift to the global church, without preconditions and without empire building. And that is why so many church leaders of all denominations trust HTB.

Holiness is seen in changing the world. The song of the Holy Spirit calls us to be a transforming and transformed community. A couple of weeks back a man called Bryan Stevenson gave a lecture at Lambeth Palace. He is a Christian, African American, a lawyer who for many years has acted free for those on death row. His book, *Just Mercy*, is inspiring. He spoke amazingly powerfully, inspiringly, on transforming society, to a group with some influential people, including Paul Cowley. A very few years back he won a case in the United States Supreme Court that said that children could not be sentenced to life without parole.

That was great, but he spoke about the need to be in proximity with the poor and the incarcerated, to be persistent in seeking to transform society, and to accept that we are broken. He writes that "our brokenness is also the source of our common humanity, the basis for our shared search for comfort, meaning and healing. Our shared vulnerability and imperfection nurtures and sustains our capacity for compassion."

We have to be transformed so that we can transform, and in John 15:2 Jesus calls being transformed "pruning". As Vanier says pruning comes in many forms – some we welcome and for which we hunger and call, others forced upon us by the brokenness of life. But to be pruned is a sign that the gardener is at work in us. RT Kendall called it this morning "breaking the betrayal barrier".

Pruning is painful, but it is the pain of being loved. God may feel far away; we may lose the sense of presence. We may be called to forsake various things, in order that we may bear more fruit, more life to those around us. We may be hated by many, including other Christians, I know that. There are no shortcuts, but there is always the certain hope of bearing fruit – our great purpose in a holy life. Pruning leads to holiness.

Some years ago the church organisation I led at the time ran into serious money troubles. Almost everyone had to be made redundant. We were working on projects in many parts of the world and had to cut back savagely. It was possibly not all my fault, but it was certainly my responsibility that we ran into problems. It was a time of great pruning, the worst of my life. No prayers seemed answered, no money came in. Yet out of it came the confidence that God, who raised Jesus from the dead, cannot be defeated by our failures, that even such times will lead to more fruit, as they have, under my successor and through what I have learned.

Holiness is seen in confidence that we are called, and that I am called. It is both individual and for the church. On the morning after I consciously surrendered my life to Jesus Christ, the day after October 12th 1975, the person who had led me to Christ gave me a bible. I still have it. In it he took the words of John 15:16: "You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name." I did not know it then, but that meant pruning. But far more than that, it meant hope, purpose, love, joy and grace upon grace poured out to me through so many people. And so it means for each one of us, if we will but make the choice to hold nothing back. We are all called, the question is whether we listen.

We have a dog called Bramble. I go running early and take her. One of my colleagues who commutes by the week and uses a couple of rooms at Lambeth Palace says his alarm clock is me shouting at the end of my run, "Bramble, you idiot, where is that dratted dog?" She is called, but other things are far more interesting.

Lastly, although there is far more in this most beautiful of chapters, holiness is seen in perseverance in the face of hatred and opposition (John 15:18-21). I have spoken of a man I met called Van Thuan, a Catholic Cardinal when I met him, but years before he had been Archbishop of what was then Saigon when it fell to the Communists. A few weeks later he was arrested, stripped, given only a number and thrown in the hold of a ship en route to a prison where he would spend nine years, in torture and solitude apart from roll calls.

There in the ship he heard the Lord say, "Now you have only me", and he had hope. His book is called Testimony of Hope. In the prison he persevered until his torturer was converted and joined him in prison. He converted his guards, and the more guards they rotated the more he

led to Christ. He taught the gospel to fellow prisoners in whispers down the line at roll call, training and ordaining two to pastor the church he had started. He celebrated Communion each day with a grain of rice and enough rice wine to hold in the palm of his hand.

I have never met anyone who was so at home with Jesus, and in one afternoon he reshaped my whole understanding of holiness.

We are called by no less than Jesus to be a holy people in a world where holiness is hard to apply in the midst of rapidly changing culture. We are called to be hopeful in a world relying on fear. We are called to be loving in a world that hates the other, because of every reason from race to sexuality to class to theology to customs and cultures.

We are not called to be a defensive or beleaguered people, circling the wagons to keep the enemy out – but going out and transforming society all over the world, not with our values but with the presence and living power of the Holy Spirit, in the name of Jesus under the authority of the Father.

We are to have love for one another (a real community). We are to bear fruit (a transforming community). We are to be secure because we are a called community. We are to deal with enmity and hostility (a persevering community).

Facing the challenges of the world, we need to see what holiness is. Our calling is to be a holy people available to God at any cost to us. Its cost is high, everything we have. Its pain is great, being pruned. But the impact is one that witnesses to the life of Christ, and brings millions to know Jesus.

The church has a calling which is the calling which we have to follow. If we respond as a holy people, we will see the renewal of the life of the churches of this land, and indeed around the world, in this generation. We will be the antidote to fear, the healers of abuse, the reconcilers of nations, the friends of the poor, the rescuers of the persecuted, the imprisoned and the hopeless.

Our task is clear, to witness that Jesus Christ, risen and alive, is our saviour and offers salvation to all. Our resources are infinite, the deep-cutting, powerfully loving work of the Holy Spirit. Our hope is certain, eternal life.

15 min read

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