

“Our only security, God’s excessive love for us...” Nicolas Barre

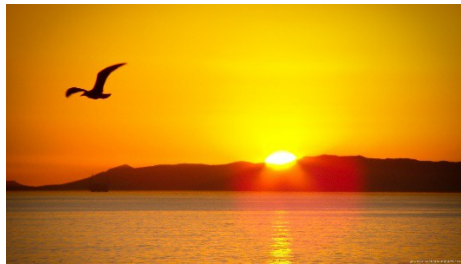
'See, I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands. You are continually before me.' ~Isaiah 49:16



We are told that each of us is carved upon the hands of God. It means that everything we do matters to God. God has chosen us, we are loved, special and unique. God will never forget any of us. We will always be in God's tender loving care. Even when life throws everything at us, God will never do so. We will be helped to find balance and calm through everything we have to face each day.

How rich are the depths of God...

.How rich are the depths of God - how deep is God's wisdom and knowledge and how impossible to penetrate God's motives or understand God's methods. Who could ever know the mind of the Lord? ~St Paul's letter to the Romans 11:33-34

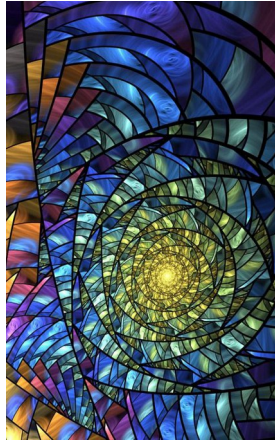


These lines are full of meaning and depth. They were written by Paul over much reflection on how he felt God was present in his life. Like all of us Paul grappled with the great issues of life only to end up in admiration of God's boundless wisdom. Paul had a great appreciation of the richness and depth of God's blessings in his life. We appreciate that the energy and presence of God exists out there somewhere. We know it's the heartbeat of our lives, our world and the universe at large. Yet we also have to face moments in life that really test our faith.

As we know life can be unpredictable and uncertain. Like a gentle tide that lifts our boat it can also turn into a raging storm threatening to swamp us. Yet in the middle of every uncertainty, storm and darkness, there remains a sense of hope and optimism. This hope and optimism is at the heart of the Easter story too. Take away these and there can be no Easter. But what do we mean by hope and optimism? They can be empty and shallow if left on their own but in the context of a loving God they are powerful and liberating. When all else seems to be gone, God will always be there and will never abandon or desert us. This is real hope and it is life giving. We pray to God today and during this month of May, to help us through all the challenges of life. We pray that we will always remain hopeful, knowing that God will always be at our side even when we are not so sure.

Easter is a celebration of hope...

People are like stained glass windows. They sparkle and shine when the sun is shining but when the darkness sets in, their true beauty is revealed only if there is a light from within.



Easter is a celebration of hope and letting the light in. This is the Easter story. The resurrection of Jesus will shatter the darkness. It has no escape. Easter is all about a great sense of hope, new beginnings and a new journey. If the story of Jesus had ended in the tomb it really would have been the end. There would have been no point continuing. The energy and momentum of his life would have been gone forever. But what happened on Holy Saturday night changed this forever. We say "Jesus is risen" rather than "Jesus has risen". There is an important distinction here. In saying that Jesus is risen means he is still with us, still present in our world and is still present in our lives. Every day when we share love, nurture it, encourage it, celebrate it, embrace it and welcome love we are living the Easter message.

We are Easter people and without the light of the Resurrection we have nothing to hold onto. Life has little meaning without it. This Easter we are invited to be open to the light of Christ in our lives. If we return to the image of stained glass window, it is about recognising the light you have within. So often we take it for granted, ignore it or pretend others have it so much better. But our light is so precious. Allow it to be rekindled and energised this Easter.

There are two ways of spreading the light, to be the candle or the mirror that reflects it.



The concept of 'Darkness to Light' has huge spiritual significance too. The Easter story is built on light shattering darkness. At the heart of the Easter story is that God is light and love. We all experience darkness, sadness and difficulties from time to time and sometimes the experience can be hugely difficult. It is good and important to know that in the midst of our deepest darkness, light is near and always will be. Even if we are not sure where this light is, we can trust that there are others who gladly want to hold the light for us.

Of huge importance is that God is not the cause of our darkness, but is very much with us in the darkness of our own lives. This means that God is always calling us towards the light and never wants us to remain stuck in darkness. We pray today for anyone who is searching for the light, anyone who is looking for the light and anyone who is not sure in which direction to search. A key feature of dawn is that it slowly takes hold and gently pushes the darkness out. May God's light gently fill your life too today and indeed every day.



On this journey we are promised that the Risen Jesus, is with us every step of the way. We are promised light, direction, energy, hope, courage, strength, meaning and fulfillment on this journey. The only expectation is to simply be open to these blessings. Nothing else is needed. It is only we who may have much bigger expectations. So if our expectations are way too high it is often best to lower them so that they match to our story, our circumstances and our pace of life. God's expectations of us are incredibly reasonable and wonderfully generous. To say that God doesn't mind if we fall asleep while saying our prayers is brilliant. There is a freedom here to just be and to simply do our best. Even if we fall short, God is still with us and nothing will ever change this. It is called the Good News of Easter. There is no need to be fearful, guilty or down hearted. We are invited to start where we are, to do our best and whatever that best may be, God is delighted with us.

Today is a good day to know that we can find God whenever and wherever we want. God is most certainly not into perfection or a perfect prayer. It is good to start where you are and with what you are doing. Throughout this week we will be reminded of the incredible love that God has for each of us. Easter is a good time to get a sense of this love. It is foundation on which many of our lives depend.



Reaching in to reach out is a worthy mission and one that in terms of enduring values can appeal to the spirit of the age. It is a mission for which the Church as people of God is especially well placed.'

We are comfortable living on the externals. We often go through the motions, do what needs to be done, tick all the boxes and just go with the flow of life. Sometimes we drift with the flow and take everything as it comes. We don't always look within us, to our own inner feelings, thoughts, hopes and dreams. Our inner voice sometimes screams to be heard. Every healthy and good religion allows us to connect with our inner selves. We do this through prayer, quiet time, reflection, meditation, silence or taking time out to just be.

Once we give ourselves a chance to reach within, we are in fact reaching to God and doing our best to understand that God is often our stepping stone in life. When we race through life, jumping from one moment to the next, we can often forget the stepping stones. We can only find them or use them, if we slow down and take it one step at a time. When was the last time you reached within yourself? Every time we reach in, we slow ourselves down enough, to give us a genuine chance of connecting with the energy or presence of God in our life.



Our faith can help us through difficult times, helping us to find courage and strength. We feel a flicker of light and hope present. It doesn't have to be dazzling bright, but once it is there it can make all the difference. When there is no faith present, it can be much harder to deal with the challenges that life can throw at us. We pray to God today and during the coming days of Easter to help us through all the challenges of life. We pray that we will always remain hopeful, knowing that God is always on our side even when all seems lost.

"Whatever happens, be always at peace, and trust in God..." Nicolas Barre

We are companions on a Journey



Opening Hymn: *Gather Us In*

Here in this place, new light is streaming,
Now is the darkness, vanished away,
See, in this space, our fears and our dreamings,
Brought here to you in the light of this day.

Gather us in the lost and forsaken,
Gather us in the blind and the lame;
Call to us now, and we shall awaken,
We shall arise at the sound of our name.

We are the young, our lives are a mystery,
We are the old who yearn for your face,
We have been sung throughout all of history,
Called to be light to the whole human race.

Gather us in and hold us forever,
Gather us in and make us your own;
Gather us in all peoples together,
Fire of love in our flesh and our bone.

Opening Prayer:

As we gather here in your name,
Open our minds to know your voice.
Open our hands to do your work.
Open our hearts to hold your Spirit.

All: Companion God, You call us to be people of journey. You call us to enter into the story of your people that stretches back through all of time. Remind us that our journey of faith is walked in and with this community. We ask this in the name of Jesus, who walks with us. Amen

Word of God: Luke 24: 30-35

And it happened that, while he was with them at table, he took bread, said a blessing, broke it, and gave it to them. With that their eyes were opened and they recognized him, but he vanished from their sight. Then they said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he spoke to us on the way and opened the scriptures to us?" So they set out at once and returned to Jerusalem where they found gathered together the eleven and those with them who were saying: "The Lord has truly been raised and has appeared to Simon!" Then the two recounted what had taken place on the way and how he was made known to them in the breaking of the bread. The Gospel of the Lord

Our Response:

God our Companion, You walk with us and constantly call us to more abundant life.
May we recognize your offer of friendship to us
with every step we take,
day after day, on our journey to be more fully united with you.
May we respond to you as a friend
by listening and discerning;

by sharing stories;
by making a hospitable place for you in our lives;
by learning from you how to live with darkness and unknowing.
May our friendship with you
overflow beyond boundaries
as we seek to accompany others along their way.

You have given us yourself, God of Mystery.
May we, like you, empty ourselves in service and radiate your intimate love and bountiful presence
throughout all of creation. Amen.

Intercessions

Let us pray for the needs of the community

Final Hymn: Companions on the Journey

Refrain

We are companions on the journey, breaking bread and sharing life;
and in the love we bear is the hope we share
for we believe in the love of our God,
we believe in the love of our God.

Verse 1

No longer strangers to each other, no longer strangers in God's house;
we are fed and we are nourished
by the strength of those who care,
by the strength of those who care. Refrain

Verse 2

We have been gifted with each other, and we are called by the Word of the Lord:
to act with justice, to love tenderly,
and to walk humbly with our God,
to walk humbly with our God. Refrain

Verse 3

We will seek and we shall find; we will knock and the door shall be opened;
we will ask and it shall be given,
for we believe in the love of our God,
we believe in the love of our God. Refrain

Verse 4

We are made for the glory of our God, for service in the name of Jesus;
to walk side by side with hope in our hearts,
for we believe in the love of our God,
we believe in the love of our God. Refrain

CLOSING PRAYER:

Let us close by joining our hearts in prayer with the words of Archbishop Oscar Romero: It helps now and then to step back and take the long view. The reign of God is not only beyond our efforts. It is beyond our vision. We accomplish in our lifetime only a tiny fraction of the magnificent enterprise that is God's work. Nothing we do is complete, which is another way of saying the reign of God always lies beyond us. No statement says all that could be said. No prayers fully express our faith. No confession brings perfection. No pastoral visit brings wholeness. No program accomplishes the church's mission. We cannot do everything but there is a sense of liberation in realizing that, because this enables us to do something and do it well. It may be incomplete but it is a beginning, a step along the way, an opportunity for God's grace to enter and do the rest.

Blessing

Let's now bless each other and our journeys with our final blessing...

All: As we go about our day, O God; As we strive to walk with Jesus as people of Journey, Remind us that we make this journey in community And we find you revealed in one another. May your grace, mercy and peace, Bless us, keep us and transform us all, this day, now and forever. Amen.