



St John's Cathedral 聖公會聖約翰座堂

Anglican Diocese of Hong Kong Island
Hong Kong Sheng Kung Hui

Message of Hope: Discovering hope in desperate times

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Hi. I'm Will Newman, a priest at St John's Cathedral Hong Kong.

As we live through this time of coronavirus, Hong Kong has been doing relatively well in limiting transmission of the virus up to now. But still many people here and around the world are suffering: those who are ill with the virus, and those who have died; their families and friends; people in lockdown, in traumatic isolation, in fear; people who have lost their jobs or their income, and do not know which way to turn for help.

The French writer Albert Camus' novel 'The Plague' is an account of a fictional plague in a town in North Africa in the 1940s. This plague is far more deadly than the coronavirus: it kills almost everyone who is infected, until it seems that the plague is controlling people with fear, holding the town in its evil grasp, with no end in sight. But finally the plague starts to respond to the serum. One by one, victims start to recover, and hope gradually returns to the town. Camus writes, 'Once the faintest stirrings of hope became possible, the dominion of the plague was ended.'

The great Easter stories – Mary Magdalene's encounter with the risen Christ in the garden, Doubting Thomas finding faith, the two disciples on the Road to Emmaus – are stories of discovering hope at a time of doubt, defeat and despair. Discovering hope in desperate times makes all the difference, as Mary learnt in the garden, and the other disciples too. To discover new hope is to experience Resurrection. Hope breaks the power of evil, the dominion of the plague; hope springs eternal, rising again in you and me with the promise of new life.

Hope is one of the great Christian virtues. It's one of the three mentioned by St Paul in 1 Corinthians 13, the reading we often hear at church weddings: 'Faith, Hope, Love abide, these three', says Paul. The enemy of hope is fear. That's why so often in the bible when God speaks, or an angel brings a message from God, the first words are 'Fear not'; 'Do not fear'. They are the words of God spoken through the prophet Isaiah to the Israelites in exile in Babylon; they are the words of the angel Gabriel to Mary, to Joseph, and to the shepherds at Christmas, and to the women outside the empty tomb in Matthew's gospel; they are the words of Jesus when he hears that the daughter of Jairus has died, in Luke's gospel: words that dispel fear and signal the start of hope.

In the midst of all the disruption and suffering caused by the coronavirus, new signs of hope are visible around the world, like spring flowers coming into bloom. We see them in the fresh kindness of friends and strangers, in renewed care and support for the elderly, and in the way so many people are seeing more clearly what is really important: relationships, friends, and love. We do not have to fall under the fearful spell of the virus.

The Christian story of Easter is a story of new light in the darkness, and fresh hope in the face of despair. It is an age-old story, and if you and I will tell it with our lives, then it lives again!