

Coronavirus or Covid-19 seems to have taken priority in all our lives. Having been encouraged for years to use our own reusable coffee cups, Starbucks have now banned their use for the present time. As you will see in the newsheet the use of the common cup has been banned and we are to receive communion in bread only. Yesterday at Synod the Bishop preached about the love of God affecting all that we say and do. Love is a much more contagious force than coronavirus and when we allow Jesus to plant it into our heart, we can almost feel it spreading from us to everyone around us, and from everyone around us to many, many others.

Apart from the spirit of love we need today the spirit of hope. The coronavirus, terrorist attacks, sudden death, cancer, unemployment are among the many dangers around in our world today that we could quite easily live without the important spirit of hope which is certainly an important part of being a Christian. But there is a huge difference between genuine hope and foolish hope. The apostle Paul tells God's people not to lose heart when the troubles of this life dim our outlook on the future. When we are discouraged by the sin and injustice of the world, a broken relationship, a tough situation at work, a grim financial outlook, a health crisis, and more, it can feel as if we are muddling around in the dark. We need to refocus and regain our perspective. We can sit around in the dark or we look towards the light of Jesus. Paul says the problems we see are temporary, but the hope we have in Jesus—though unseen—is eternal.

Imagine you are a 99-year-old man, married to an equally old woman who has been barren all her life, and God comes to you and promises you that you're going to be the ancestor of a multitude of nations? You know what you're hearing is impossible. But this isn't just some fortune teller looking into a crystal ball who is speaking to you; it's God. Abraham believed that it would happen as God promised. We call that faith, trusting that God is going to do what God has promised to do. Even when it sounds like it might be impossible.

Paul tells the Romans that Christians have a lot in common with Abraham. Abraham was made right before God, not by following the law, but by faith, by trusting in God's promises.

At this time there was a big controversy going on in the church about whether Gentiles needed to first become Jews before they could become Christians. The problem arose when the Gentiles also responded to the good news about Jesus. Were they going to have to become Jews first? As a missionary Paul was particularly sensitive to the plight of the Gentiles. His theology objected to the whole idea of Christians being subject to the Jewish law and he made a strong case by using the example of Abraham. Abraham lived before the law was given, so no one could say that Abraham was made righteous by following the law it was Abraham's faith that made him righteous before God. Hoping against hope, Abraham grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, being fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. Abraham's children aren't just the Jews and it is not ethnicity, but it is the faith of Abraham which binds God's people together.

Paul draws a parallel between us and Abraham. Like Abraham, we also trust in God's promise of life even during death. But as Christians, the promise of God comes through the promise of the resurrection. Our hope is in God's promise of eternal life.

The theologian, Paul Tillich makes a distinction between a genuine hope and a foolish hope. Tillich says that where there is genuine hope, it is present in the now and it has already begun. But where a beginning of what is hoped for is absent, hope is foolishness. It's like wishful thinking or living in a fantasy world.

Is trusting in the promise of eternal life a foolish hope or a genuine hope for us? It's only genuine if the seeds of that promise are already present for us. If we are just longing for some pie-in-the-sky-by-and-by-after-we-die, our hope is foolish. The seeds of God's promise are already present for us if we open our eyes. We may see a glimpse of eternal life when we experience an act of self-giving love, or a moment of absolute truth or when we gather at the communion table and receive Christ's body and blood. Our hope is genuine, because there is already a presence and a beginning of what we hope for which grows by experience and faith. Like Abraham and Sarah, we don't turn a blind eye to the facts. We will encounter setbacks and trials in our lives but as people of faith we are called to trust in God's promises even during all that bogs us down. Hoping for life even in the midst of death is not a foolish hope.

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

There's nothing in this entire universe that can compare with God's love. When we watch Love Island or look around at our human relationships comparing human love, full of selfishness and pettiness and prejudice, to God's holy, sacrificial, unending love, we can see immediately that human love is often a fake love because John 3:16 is what real love is all about.

God loved all of us, even before we loved Him. If there is one lesson from human history, it is that we can hate just as easily as we can love we are not very good at this love business. In I John 4 we read these powerful words, “Whoever does not love does not know God . . .” “Because God is love.” God is the measure of real love, and it is only by God's Spirit that we can know and share real love.

God had a million reasons to condemn the world, but he saved the world by giving the absolute greatest gift He could give. Thus, God made us a promise that whoever believes in God's Son, Jesus Christ, will not perish but have eternal life. That is the promise we must accept in our own life.

If we are “born of the Spirit?” we infuse ourselves with Holy Spirit's gifts of faith, hope and love. Our spirit is contagious just like the many kinds of viruses that can be passed on. Rather than a spirit of fear, or of anger may it be the spirit of love be the spirit that we pass on to others. Can you “infect” someone with Holy Spirit of faith, hope and love this week?