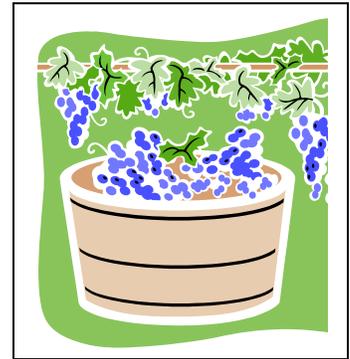


October 23, 2022
The Church gathered at St. Mary's Episcopal
Message from Michael Burke, Rector



Scripture readings:

The Gospel according to: Luke Chapter 18, verses 9-14



In the flash of this moment...

You're the best of who we are...

- Canadian poet and songwriter Bruce Cockburn

In case you haven't noticed, I've been away from this Sanctuary for a time. Over the last two weeks, I've been struggling back from a nasty bout with COVID, which has been kicking my butt.

Thank you Rev. Israel, Ross, Chris, and team, for keeping things running so smoothly.

So I've had some time to sit on my back deck and think about things. Big things. Like Doug Adam's novel "The Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy".

In the novel, a group of hyper-intelligent pan-dimensional beings demand to learn the **Answer to the Ultimate Question of Life, The Universe, and Everything** from the [supercomputer Deep Thought](#), specially built for this purpose. It takes Deep Thought 7+ 1/2 million years to compute and check the answer, which turns out to be (anyone?)... [42](#). Deep Thought points out that the answer seems meaningless because the beings who instructed it never knew what the question was.

Sitting on my back deck, I decided the ultimate question of life for me seems to be, "*Where is your hope?*" and I don't think the answer is 42.

Let me share what I'm thinking. If you are watching the news these days, you know that Russia and Iran, are sending semi-autonomous drones to blow up the Ukrainian power grid, connected to some of the world's largest nuclear reactors. If I answer the question, "*where does my hope lie for the world right*

now?”, I can’t honestly say, “Human progress and science.” Scientific achievement only magnifies the problem. We are the first species in the history of planet earth who have now developed the means to destroy life on this planet in its entirety. A recently declassified study¹ suggests the detonation of as few as ten nuclear weapons could end life on this planet as we know it. The present count is somewhere in the neighborhood of 13,000. Ten of the largest could take the whole planet down. The greatest technology in the world works against us, if human beings use it for destructive purposes.

So, I might consider, if not with science and technology, perhaps my hope lies with human beings, with human reason. As I younger man, I might have said that. But honestly, the evidence is not particularly strong or convincing right now. Over the weekend, I was reading of a poll in which 25% of Americans said they believed that Donald J Trump was our legitimately elected President right now. And 37% of Americans believe that Barak Obama is a Muslim. In spite of all the evidence to the contrary. People still believe crazy things. People are often unpredictably unreasonable. A shaky thing to put my faith on. So, you’ll have to forgive me, if my faith in the human species alone is at a low ebb right now.

So, if my faith in science, technology, and human reason is a little shaky, where else does my hope lie?

Where does my hope lie?

I think THAT is the right question to ask right now, because to live without hope seems to be the saddest fate of all.

So, where then, does my hope lie?

Let me share with you what I see.

We are in a worldwide pandemic, the nation and world are divided, and yet, here is what I am looking at:

Over the last twelve months, this little St. Mary’s family, all of you, have:

- Helped seven homeless families get back into stable housing
- Through your partnership with F.I.S.H., have brought groceries for 125,000 meals to families in our own neighborhoods who struggle with going hungry,
- Supported the families of 82 three and four year-olds in getting a firm start in life with social and emotional learning programs,
- Visited the sick and those in trouble,
- Nurtured loving supportive community for 22 elders at The Thomas Center who might otherwise be living alone,

¹ See: <https://www.businessinsider.com/how-many-super-nukes-destroy-world-2016-12>, <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/how-many-nuclear-weapons-exist-and-who-has-them/>; <https://www.ucsusa.org/nuclear-weapons/worldwide>; and <https://www.atomicarchive.com/science/effects/nuclear-winter.html>.

- Hosted over 1400 self-help and recovery groups so individuals and families could regain sobriety and sanity,
- Provided safety and direction for at-risk youth,
- Dug deep in reflecting on how we might live beyond privilege and prejudice,
- Showed up in person at the shelters, the street corners AND the Assembly and stood for civility and basic human dignity,
- And came together every single week, come hell or high COVID numbers, online or in one way or another, standing in the parking lot if need be,
- And grounded yourselves in worship and faith to seek God's strength and God's power to be able to do it all again another week. You manifested a power and an ability that is not entirely of you.

Damn! Think about that!

And you did it all in the midst of a worldwide pandemic when all of our personal lives were under stress and strain, and at times we were just all trying to keep it together for another week.

Damn! **That's** where my hope lies.

My hope lies in the power of God working through everyday people like you and I.

"In the Flash of This Moment, you're the best of who we are."

Did you see it? The glimpse of the Kingdom of God. Not the numbers, the faces? Can you imagine the faces of everybody involved in all that. The packing groceries, homeless families, twelve step groups, all those people. Pause, and picture in your mind, the people working together. Margaret sewing activity kits for Brother Francis; Sandra packing for F.I.S.H.; Linda, Deb, and Erin teaching the little ones. Mike and Kelly shoveling the snow so A.A. can make it in the front door. Matt and Janel showing up for the teens, trying to make their way in a confusing world. Ruth and Karol and Sara showing up at the Assembly meetings.

All this work of God in the world, being brought about, because 250 households/families are helping make that happen. Through the facilities, the ministries, the members of St. Mary's. That's what we mean when we say **"the ministers are all the people of St. Mary's."** You make that happen. I have seen that happen in front of me over the past twelve months. That's what I see.

In the Flash of this Moment, you are the best of who we are.

If you grew up Baptist, you're worried about that whole pride thing. Don't worry about being proud right now, just look at what God is doing through this community. Amongst Us. Within us. Around us. Luke's Gospel from today reminds us that we shouldn't be bloated and self-satisfied as though this was all the work of our genius or skill. We boast NOT of our own power

but the power of God working through us, broken vessels and shattered pots. 250 households, all of us regular people with all kinds of complicated and often mixed-up lives,

And in doing all this, we are the hearts and hands of Christ in this world. The might and brutality of the world, through the Roman Empire of old, thought it had the last word when they nailed the Savior to the cross, but Christ is risen, through all of us. As we do this, we show forth the light of Christ in the world. We follow Jesus. In the words of passage from the Book of Timothy this morning, we “fight the good fight, we finish the race, we keep the faith.” Not just with slogans and flowery religious language, but with our lives. One day at a time.

We persist, as Rev. Dawn said last week. There. Our faith in a nutshell. Or in a mustard seed, as Bishop Mark reminded us a few short weeks ago. If you’re having a hard time seeing it, We’ll help you see it. That’s why we live in community. To help one another.

The Prophet Joel in the First Reading today prophesized the Lord and he said,

“Then afterward I will pour out my spirit on all flesh;

your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,

your old men shall dream dreams,

and your young men shall see visions.

Did you see it? ***“In the flash of this moment, you’re the best of who we are.”***

Its important that we all pause and recognize all that happens. Because in the next weeks, we’ll get all the stewardship packets in the mail. Our expenses are rising by 10% this year. Some folks are slow to reconnect, and the average increase we see in pledges year over year is about a 3.7% increase, because people do raise their pledges each year, recognizing our costs go up even as we trim where we can. I don’t want to gloss over this. To keep being who we are, this year it will take an average 10% increase to make this all work.

We will soon have to face all that. So ***before*** you think about all that, just pause for a moment and marvel at what God is doing right in this little family of 250 households.

In the Flash of this Moment, you’re the best of who we are!

That’s where my hope lies. The power of God, working in us, can do more than we can ever ask or imagine.

Believing that Together, we are More Than Enough.

That’s where my hope lies. That’s where my hope lies.

Scripture Appointed for Today

The Collect

Almighty and everlasting God, increase in us the gifts of faith, hope, and charity; and, that we may obtain what you promise, make us love what you command; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Hebrew Scriptures - Joel 2:23-32

O children of Zion, be glad
and rejoice in the Lord your God;

for he has given the early rain for your vindication,
he has poured down for you abundant rain,
the early and the later rain, as before.

The threshing floors shall be full of grain,
the vats shall overflow with wine and oil.

I will repay you for the years
that the swarming locust has eaten,

the hopper, the destroyer, and the cutter,
my great army, which I sent against you.

You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied,
and praise the name of the Lord your God,
who has dealt wondrously with you.

And my people shall never again be put to shame.

You shall know that I am in the midst of Israel,
and that I, the Lord, am your God and there is no other.

And my people shall never again
be put to shame.

6

Then afterward
I will pour out my spirit on all flesh;

your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
your old men shall dream dreams,
and your young men shall see visions.

Even on the male and female slaves,
in those days, I will pour out my spirit.

I will show portents in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke. The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes. Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved; for in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those who escape, as the Lord has said, and among the survivors shall be those whom the Lord calls.

The Psalm - Psalm 65

1 You are to be praised, O God, in Zion; *
to you shall vows be performed in Jerusalem.

2 To you that hear prayer shall all flesh come, *
because of their transgressions.

3 Our sins are stronger than we are, *
but you will blot them out.

4 Happy are they whom you choose
and draw to your courts to dwell there! *
they will be satisfied by the beauty of your house,
by the holiness of your temple.

5 Awesome things will you show us in your righteousness,
O God of our salvation, *
O Hope of all the ends of the earth
and of the seas that are far away.

6 You make fast the mountains by your power; *
they are girded about with might.

7

7 You still the roaring of the seas, *
the roaring of their waves,
and the clamor of the peoples.

8 Those who dwell at the ends of the earth will tremble at your marvelous signs; *
you make the dawn and the dusk to sing for joy.

9 You visit the earth and water it abundantly;
you make it very plenteous; *
the river of God is full of water.

10 You prepare the grain, *
for so you provide for the earth.

11 You drench the furrows and smooth out the ridges; *
with heavy rain you soften the ground and bless its increase.

12 You crown the year with your goodness, *
and your paths overflow with plenty.

13 May the fields of the wilderness be rich for grazing, *
and the hills be clothed with joy.

14 May the meadows cover themselves with flocks,
and the valleys cloak themselves with grain; *
let them shout for joy and sing.

The Epistle - 2 Timothy 4:6-8,16-18

I am already being poured out as a libation, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. From now on there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

At my first defense no one came to my support, but all deserted me. May it not be counted against them! But the Lord stood by me and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. So I was rescued from the lion's mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and save me for his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

The Gospel - Luke 18:9-14

Jesus told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt: "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, was praying thus, `God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income.' But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast and saying, `God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other; for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted."