

9 July Thursday after Trinity 4

When the present pandemic began, I was struck by the number of people making confident statements about the future, often beginning their comments with something like, “When this crisis is over, **and it will be.....**”

Being optimistic is generally a good thing, partly because it helps us keep going when things are tough and also because it reflects the theological virtue of hope. It seems that God has written into our human nature an expectation of a new heaven and a new earth, where there will be no mourning or crying or pain anymore. That vision comes of course from the last part of the Revelation to St John, the last book of the Bible.

Optimism can however prevent us from spotting danger ahead and imagining that things are not as bad as they seem. Tell that to those wrestling with the Corona virus, or the children of the Yemen or Syria, the Uighur and other persecuted people, the victims of domestic or sexual abuse - I don't need to go on. Don't forget that St John's new heaven and a new earth lay beyond the most appalling suffering.

So, although as I say, the human instinct for optimism should not be despised, it is only a reflection of something much more substantial and trustworthy.

Christian hope is not at all like the cheery attitude of Dr Pangloss in Voltaire's novel *Candide* for whom this is the best of all possible worlds in which everything is for the best. His sunny optimism contains little to comfort those facing great tragedy - whether individuals or, as at the moment, the whole world.

“When this crisis is over (please God that it will be)” but “**and** it will be...” Who knows? It may or it may not, and no amount of wishful thinking will change that. At some point in the future this world will come to an end, whether, in TS Eliot’s image, with a bang or a whimper, and of course we shall all die.

So we don’t need people to tell us, with no real evidence, “It’ll be all right.”

What we need is someone with the authority to assure us that even beyond the very worst that can happen, life is still worth living. And in Jesus who invites us to lay all our cares on him, we have such an authority. Our hope does not rest on wishful thinking about the way the course of this world will go, but on the truth that all things come from God and all things return to God, the beginning and the end of all, who sustains the universe. **God has given us the world to be enjoyed in the light of the resurrection of Jesus.** This is why while we should strive with all our energies for the good of this world and all its inhabitants, here “we have no abiding city”.

Please God the optimists are proved right this time, thanks to the ingenuity, skill , resilience and determination, which God has also given to our human race. But don’t allow the good, optimism, to become the enemy of the best, a sure and certain hope of a city that is to come.