

**May I speak in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen**

As I was sat waiting to meet a baptism family yesterday, I started to read through the children's prayers and letters recently posted in the gold 'Dear God' letterbox at St Just Church. The box was, as usual, stuffed full with a variety of beautiful prayers and letters, many accompanied by little drawings and dutifully signed with the child's full name and exact age. As ever, I was struck, just as I am when I read the prayers hanging on the trees or written in the prayer books, by the persistent hope for heaven and eternity.

'Dear God, I hope you live forever' said one, 'Dear God please look after my family who have died' said another. 'Can you keep my brother and my nanny safe in heaven for me and ask them to look down on me' said another. So often, the prayers left in churches by both adults and children convey such a longing and hope for an assurance of eternity.

Over the last three weeks we have heard Jesus Christ frequently use the words 'eternal life' in the Bread of Life discourses. In the final part of our sermon series, I promised to preach on the Eucharist in relation to the 'future' and that phrase eternal life is key to it all.

In presenting the idea of eternal life, the Gospel of John is very different to the Pauline letters and other three Gospels. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and Paul all refer to eternal life as a future experience and something that is to be hoped and waited for. For them eternity refers to the infinity of time – the long extension of time in which God will ultimately bring all things together and to a close.

But the Gospel of John puts a new twist on all this because Jesus talks of eternal life as a present possession, or a present possibility. The Johannine idea of Eternity, also picked up by Saint Augustine, is of a timelessness – God stands outside of and yet acts within what we know to be days, months and years. In the Gospel of John we are urged to grasp eternity as both within and beyond our temporal experience, and the Bread of Life plays a central role, as a symbol of the now and the not yet.

I learnt an incredible story for the first time this week.

On the 20th July in 1969 the Apollo 11 lunar module landed on the moon with it's two astronauts, Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin, on board. At the time this was a tremendously historic and scientific achievement, Humanity was to walk upon the moon for the first time taking a small step and a giant leap into the future. Once the module had landed, but before they made that step outside, Buzz Aldrin made a public statement over the radio. He said 'I'd like to take this opportunity to ask every person listening in to pause for a moment and contemplate the events of the past few hours and give thanks in his or her own way'.

In the radio silence, Aldrin opened some little plastic packages that he had with him. In the little chalice that his church had given him, he poured out a little wine and in the one sixth gravity, the wine curled and gracefully came up the side of the cup. He took out the little piece of bread that had been blessed by the pastor of his church.

He then quietly read a small passage of scripture and – to quote his own words ‘I ate the tiny host and swallowed the wine. I gave thanks for the intelligence and spirit that had brought two young pilots to the Sea of Tranquility.’ It was all rather hushed up by NASA but the truth remains that some of the first words spoken on the moon were the words of the one who made the earth and moon and the very first liquid poured and food eaten, were the body and blood of Christ.

Aldrin later described his need to carry out this little ceremony as his way of expressing gratitude and hope as humanity embarked on this new step in it’s future. Away from the earthly laws of physics and stood upon one of the celestial objects that marks the passing of time, one can only imagine the view that Aldrin had from up there. Gazing from the surface of the moon, looking at earth in its entirety. The fact that way up there, a human being made it his first priority to turn towards Christ in his bread and wine, his body and blood, is just plain awesome, isn’t it?

In that moon landing were held the hopes and dreams of human endeavour, and yet in that bread and that wine, whether here or on the moon, are held the hopes and dreams of God’s endeavour. I love the fusion of these two things in the Buzz Aldrin story.

The promise of ‘eternal life’ in the Gospel of John is shared by Christ as a beacon of hope. Offered to lift humanity’s eyes and hearts upwards and outwards and the bestowal of a promise that there is a realm in our creation where reconciliation, timelessness, peace, and wholeness is not hypothetical, but very very real.

In the reading from Proverbs, the writer sings ‘Lay aside immaturity, and live, and walk in the way of insight’ Paul writes ‘do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is’. In both these readings those who reject hope are seen to be foolish, and those who look hopefully towards the good of God are mature and wise.

Hope, and especially the hope offered by conceiving of a reconciled future, is never an idle day-dream. Hope is an extraordinary tenet of the Christian faith, because such hope is a Christian virtue. By believing and hoping in the possibility of an eternal life beyond worldly priorities, we begin to look around us to see it in action. More than that we shape our own lives to bring it into action. It challenges the things that run counter to it, especially ideas around death or injustice.

A longing hope and belief in eternity breaks into the place of time and space and begins to grow – it brings an impetus to live differently because it becomes a defining goal.

As Christians, sustained and formed by the bread and wine in the Eucharist, we are shaped by Christ in our vocation. In living out our calling to love neighbour and love God we make real, in the present, a glimpse of the eternal reconciled future.

Over these last three weeks we have looked at the past the present and the future of the central practice of the Christian faith. We first heard how the bread of life shaped the people of God in the past, then how the people of God are assured of his presence in the now, and today how the bread of life gives us a glimpse of an eternal hope in the future.

Whether received on earth or in the celestial skies, the bread of life brings all these dimensions together. Past, present, and future, are made real in that tiny piece of bread, blessed and received at the very heart of the Christian faith.

Amen