

**Sermon for Sunday 22nd November 2020, Christ the King**  
**by Lottie Jones, Ordinand at Ridley Hall**  
**Ephesians 1:15-end, Matthew 25:31-end**

Have you ever been somewhere that has taken your breath away? It could be somewhere far away that you went to a long time ago, it could be the park just down the road that made you stop the other day when the autumn leaves were settling and sun was just rising. One of my most memorable breathtaking place was when I went to Oeschinensee, a mountain lake in Switzerland. As we went up the mountain and saw the lake, it was so beautiful, I stood in awe looking at what was ahead, then we made our way down to the lake and it got more incredible, immersing ourselves further into the beauty of what we saw and then I ended up swimming in the mountain lake, which was freezing but incredible - fully immersed in this breathtaking environment. It reminded me of the vastness of creation, the smallness of humanity and the creativity of God.

I think Paul's opening statement to the church in Ephesus is a bit like those breathtaking moments. The further you get into it, the more exciting and immersive it gets, it reminds you how incredible God is and as you keep reading, keep delving, you get more and more out of it. Our reading today finds itself at the end of that opening chapter, you can feel Paul's passion and conviction as he writes this letter, full of truth we need to hear.

This year, I think we can say, has been, "interesting". We are now into month nine of a global pandemic, in the midst of this global pandemic there has been a recognising and awakening of the vast inequalities in our world: the systematic institutionalised racism that ravages society, the decimation of jobs and security for many people across the world, the reality of people struggling to find the money to feed their children, the lack of hugging and being close to people we love, particularly those who are living or have relatives in care homes and to top it off we have had an American election that has been incredibly divisive.

This passage, in the midst of our current climate, is an important reminder that through anxiety, uncertainty, oppression and suffering we have a

**gospel of hope and a king we can trust.** So let's look at that in a bit more detail.

### **Firstly, We have a gospel of hope.**

Have you ever sat in a room in late autumn, in the afternoon, reading a book and you suddenly realise, hasn't it got dark in here? To me that is a picture of how the hope that fills our hearts as Christians can gradually get dimmed without us realising it's happening. I think one of the chief forces we have to battle with as Christians in the West, is a subtle and slow erosion of the hope that our faith is based on, as it slowly and subtly gets dimmed by the world's weariness. This happens when we get over saturated by the negative media and cynicism, and it dims the joy that we can know and experience when we realise full the hope of the gospel.

Paul's prayer for the Ephesians is a prayer that the church will have a freshness in their ability to see that God has called them to something great and glorious. He says: **"I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe."**

This is an incredible prayer and it's not just for the Ephesians is it? We all need this prayer because we can all lose sight of these three things: our grasp of our hope in Christ, the understanding of our inheritance and our experience of his power at work in us. Like sitting in that room, it can all start to get rather gloomy and dull can't it.

A few years ago, I was leading a time of prayer and worship before our children's and youth groups started, as we were singing and praying, in the corner of my eye I saw my colleague's daughter twirling around to the music, so utterly captivated by the music and free to be herself. In that moment, I was powerfully reminded of the hope to which I was called. As she danced away God reminded me what my relationship with him could look like, what my hope and inheritance looked like. It looked like the abandonment of unselfconscious joy found in the dance moves of a 6 year old girl. It looked like living life to the full. It looked like complete

contentment at being in the presence of God. It looks like pure joy and life and love and hope. It's amazing what God can do through the twirling of a 6 year old. This is the hope we are called to, this is our inheritance, to not just be looking at the beautiful mountain lake from a distance but to be swimming it, to not just be looking at the twirling of a six year old but to be twirling joyfully in the presence of God. That is our hope, complete contentment and security in the love of God.

That picture God gave me isn't just a picture of what is to come, of what it will be like one day when I die and go to heaven. This hope is meant to energise and fill my life now. It's not like a torch I keep in a drawer if I need it one day, it's the light in my living room that I need to turn on everyday. Particularly in a time when we are physically shut in, we are unable to live in the freedom we long for, we need to pray this prayer for each other. That the eyes of our heart might be **enlightened, that we might know the riches of his glorious inheritance and that we might know his incomparably great power for us who believe.**

So we have a gospel of hope...

**We also have a king we can trust.**

Paul goes on to talk about the power of Christ and how that power, Jesus himself, is seated at the right hand of the father.

If you, like me, have been following American politics and refreshing your CNN news page again and again over the last few weeks you will have inevitably heard words like "the peaceful transfer of power." You will have also seen people grasping at what remaining power and influence they have in the time they have left. This power might be attractive and glamorous but it's not the power Paul is talking about.

**"That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come."**

The New Testament church had no power at all. They didn't live in a democracy, the concept hasn't yet been invented. In their world, power was exercised by people who didn't share their faith, people who didn't understand their faith, who called them atheists for not saying Caesar is Lord, cannibals for eating the body and blood of Jesus and incestuous because they met at a love feast with their brothers and sisters. They didn't have power and influence in the world that they inhabited. They were subject to the empire and all around them would have been the trappings of power, Ephesus was a power centre, for religion and civilisation. So when Paul talks to them about power, he is reminding them of a radically different power.

This is the power of Jesus. This is the power of love, the power of life, the power that cannot be overcome and destroyed by the troubles of this world.

Now more than ever we need to remind ourselves of that power. That power in the hands of a king we can trust, a king that sits on the throne, seated at the right hand of the father, a king that not only possesses this power but gives it to us. This is the power of love and life and hope. The power to live in the midst of a whirlwind and be a safe and calm presence. The power to live in a world that seems to be getting increasingly crazy but be people who have security, peace and joy. Now, if I'm honest, I don't always trust the king who holds this power and gives me this power, I too often see all the 'powers and principalities' around me and focus on them, obsess over them, refresh the BBC page that tell me how many coronavirus cases there are in Cambridge or what next bad thing has happened in the news but as I have been sitting with this passage this week, I have been reminded that I can trust the God that invites me into his presence, who holds all things in his hands and who gives me the power of love to be a steady and stable presence in the world.

My prayer for you and me this week, as we sit with this passage that the we will turn the light on in the dim room, that the eyes of our hearts will be enlightened, that we will know the hope to which we have been called and we will know the security and safety of a king we can trust.