

Hopes for 2019

Just a few days into the new year I wonder what hopes you have for 2019. And I imagine you may have fears too. I certainly do.

There is much to concern us in our world today. In our own country there is the continuing uncertainty about Brexit and the underlying divisions that that issue reflects – divisions not only amongst our elected representatives but in the population at large. There are continuing concerns about the pressures on the health service, education and transport, among other things.

Outside our own country there are continuing conflicts in many parts of the world, with all the human suffering they bring, both physical and mental. There is a worrying growth in regimes and political parties espousing an extreme right-wing agenda. There are tensions between the different superpowers which we had hoped were a thing of the past.

I could go on. It is so easy to spell out our fears for the coming year. But what about our hopes? For our Christian faith is based not on fear but on hope.

We just heard as our Bible reading that inspiring and encouraging passage from St Paul's letter to the church in Rome (Romans 8.18-25). Present suffering, difficulties, fears all need to be put into the context of God's plan for his creation: a plan of freedom, of salvation, of hope. We look forward in hope to a better future, to genuine humanity as God intended, to the goodness, holiness and justice of God's kingdom.

That is particularly the message of the Christmas season, of the incarnation: God coming into the world in the form of a vulnerable baby; God revealing himself in a supremely loving way; God sharing in our human condition; God giving us real and dependable hope.

That is summed up in those lines from the well-known Christmas hymn "O little town of Bethlehem":
"Yet in thy dark streets shineth
the everlasting Light;
the hopes and fears of all the years
are met in thee tonight."
Yes, both the hopes and the fears are the focus of that miraculous birth. Both hopes and fears are shared by our Lord Jesus Christ.

And so our hopes for 2019 should be for a better world: a world in which the values of God's kingdom are more apparent: justice, compassion, respect, forgiveness, equality, freedom, and above all love. We pray that with God's help our fears may be overcome by our hopes, and that our hopes for a better world might be realized.

Kingsley Boulton
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