

During these days of limited social meeting, it is so important for us as Christians, to keep hope alive. Hope implies confident optimism. We know that hope is a gift from God, who is the source of all hope. The Psalmist knew this to be so as he maintained his trust in God. "For God alone my soul waits in silence, for my hope is from him." Psalm 62:5. "In silence" testifies to a trust that is patient and uncomplaining. Paul recognised God as the source of eternal hope, and, the one whom believers rely on for hope. "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit?" Romans 15:13. Paul's prayer is that hope may continually overflow in unlimited measure through the power and provision of the Holy Spirit. Hope enables us to trust in God's word, and rest in His grace.

George Frederic Watts in 1826 painted a famous picture entitled Hope, which hangs in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. Interestingly, he executed it in the wake of the Long Depression of the 1870's, when the country had been plunged into economic decline, and people were questioning the existence of God. Watts said, "Faith must be the companion of hope." His idea of hope is shown by a blindfolded girl dressed in blue, seated on top of a globe with wispy clouds around its circumference. She is bending over straining to listen to the sounds from the one string which remains on her lyre. This symbolises her perseverance and fragility, also the closeness of hope and despair. Away from her at the top of the canvas, a small star is shining, to denote that there is hope beyond, and things are not as bad as she believes.

Thinking of the situation Watts found himself in, and the situation we are in now, I turned to the parable Jesus spoke about the Woman and the Judge in Luke 18:1-8. There is a command for us to obey in the first verse, and it is there for us to obey. **"Men always ought to pray and not lose heart."** KJV. The word 'ought' underlines the necessity of praying. It is something expected of us, and is basic to our relationship with God. It keeps faith and hope alive. 'Always' implies a regular rhythm rather than something which is sporadic; a consistency. 'Not faint' means don't lose heart and become discouraged; don't lose hope and give up; don't let spiritual weariness creep in; persevere; never give up.. The command is to keep on praying.

Praying enables us to keep hope alive. It is impossible not to feel fear from the threat of Covid 19, but we can talk about all our fears to God, over and over again if necessary. He is our Father, who is in no way like the unjust judge in the parable. He wants to hear our prayers; our heartfelt cries, our pleadings, our supplications, our intercessions. We can be totally honest as we pour out all our troubles and worries. Peter reminds us, "The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears open to our cries". 1 Peter 3:12 The Psalmist in a prayer for wisdom and forgiveness said, "And now Lord, what do I wait for? My hope is in you." Psalm 39:7...

May we each make the most of our time as we wait on God and hope in Him. **"And hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given us."** Romans 5:5.