

Living everyday faith hopefully

WEEK 2

Reflections by Mark Greene

Day 8

Hope in Sunday's promise



READING

"The mother of Jesus said to him, 'They have no wine.' ... Jesus said to the servants, 'Fill the jars with water' ... When the steward tasted the water that had become wine ... he called the bridegroom and said to him, 'Everyone serves the good wine first ... But you have kept the good wine until now.'"

John 2.3, 7, 9–10

REFLECTION

Hope in the Bible isn't wishful thinking. It's the certainty both that there is a new heaven and a new earth to look forward to, and that all that happens to us now will, by God's grace, be turned to good. The certainty of a glorious future puts the present in perspective.

But there's more.

Jesus' kingdom has broken in and so new possibilities abound now, foretastes of what is to come: divine

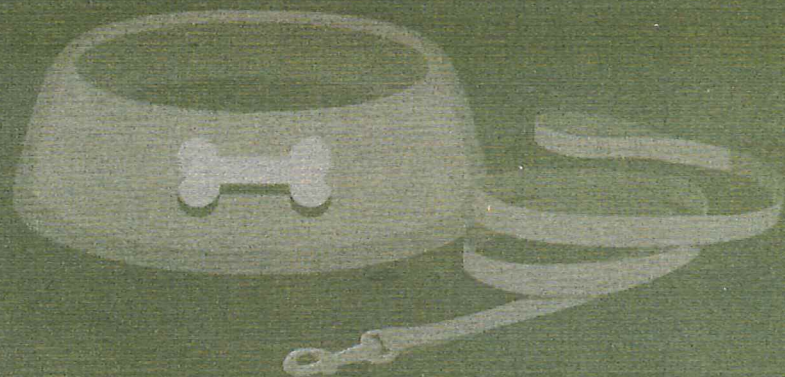
interventions, providential "coincidences", messages from above, prayers answered.

Jesus' first miracle is both a generous gift of 900 bottles of wine and a foretaste of the great wedding banquet of Christ and his bride, the Church. The wine Jesus made was better than what had been served before, just as our life in him in eternity will be better than anything we have yet tasted.

A day of rest is similar. A Sabbath rest – Sunday or not – is intended to be a reminder and a foretaste of that greater rest to come. A sign to the world of a different possibility. And our everyday lives among our friends, our families, our colleagues are also intended to be a sign: with Christ, there is a different way. The hope alive in us is a pointer to the hope for them.

RESPONSE

Sabbath is about looking back as well as looking forward. Think about the past week: where have you seen God at work in your life? Or the lives of others? What tokens of his love have you noticed? What are you grateful for?



the one about... the dogs

The helicopter pilot had radioed ahead so they knew she was coming in. Joan, mid-40s, a farmer, arm dangling off after an encounter with a chainsaw. Gabi, the head nurse, hugely experienced, a trainer of emergency nurses, would lead the triage team.

Joan is wheeled in – losing lots of blood, pulse high, blood pressure plummeting, breathing erratic. There are two priorities: keep her alive;

try to save the arm. Gabi had seen scores of patients in comparable high-jeopardy situations and they are usually very compliant with the medical team – they do exactly what they are told, they answer questions quickly, they focus. Curiously, Joan seems preoccupied, her mind elsewhere. Gabi is puzzled. She prays, “Why Lord?” God says, “Ask her.”

So Gabi asks a woman whose arm is dangling off, with a high pulse, plummeting blood pressure and erratic breathing what seems like an absurd question: “Joan, what else is going on for you at the moment?” And Joan says, “No one can look after my dogs tonight.” Her arm is dangling off but she’s worried about her dogs. Gabi says, “We’ll sort that,” and tells a nurse to get a message to Joan’s emergency contact. Immediately, Joan’s blood pressure rises, her pulse goes down, and her breathing stabilizes.

Joan lived. And the team saved her arm.

And the dogs were fed.

When the times get tough – and when they aren’t – ask God in. ●

Day 9

Hope for Monday

READING

"The Lord God planted a garden in Eden ... and there he put the man whom he had formed ... The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it."

Genesis 2.8, 15

REFLECTION

Hopelessness comes in many forms: the anguish of grief, loss, betrayal, the despair that this situation will never get better. Still, one of the quieter, more corrosive forms of hopelessness is the secret sense that the things we do day by day – the data entry, the three loads of washing, the e-mails – don't really matter to God. And if they don't matter, aren't I just wasting my time?

But, as today's reading shows us, work is a big part of what God created us to do. God's work of creation in Genesis produces order, provides food, generates joy, creates beauty, gives people the opportunity to develop the potential of his creation, for his glory

and the benefit of others. Similarly, our daily work is intended to imitate God's in contributing to making our bit of the world more like the way God would like it to be. For God's glory.

So, doing the washing creates order, prevents disease, brings joy to the wearers – and perhaps a greater measure of beauty – and liberates them to do whatever God has given them to do that day. And those are all things that are utterly in line with God's purposes. Our work matters to God, even down to ensuring a dog gets fed.

RESPONSE

Jot down some of the tasks you are going to do today. Who will benefit? How will it contribute to making your bit of the world a bit better?

Ask God for the wisdom and strength to do whatever you do in his way and to his glory.

Day 10



Hope in the crisis

READING

"When the captains of the chariots saw Jehoshaphat, they said, 'It is the king of Israel.' So they turned to fight against him; and Jehoshaphat cried out, and the Lord helped him. God drew them away from him ..."

2 Chronicles 18.31

REFLECTION

Pressure moments often reveal our instincts. Where do we turn? What or who do we turn to?

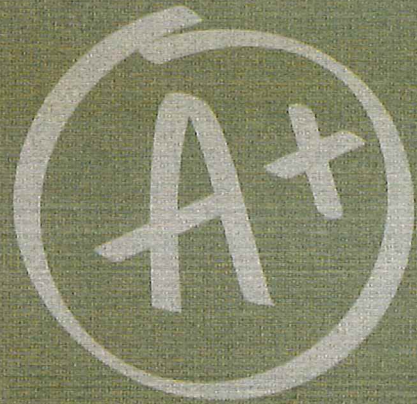
Gabi, the nurse, realizes that there was something going on beyond her professional expertise to deal with. She prays. Jehoshaphat, surrounded in a battle he should not have been in, is not so gripped by fear in the moment that he cannot think to cry out to God.

The challenges we face on our frontlines, the places where God calls us to live out our faith in our daily lives, may not be matters of life and death. We might not all have roles like Gabi's. Yet we do all encounter

people in crisis – the child that just loses it in the classroom, the boss that bawls us out for no apparent reason, the colleague we can hear weeping in the loo, the car crash that happens just in front of us ... We can't predict the crises, we can't necessarily prepare. But there is hope in the moment. Cry out to God, the one who sees all, knows all.

RESPONSE

Think about a pressure moment you've been through in the past. How did you respond? What was good? What would you like to do differently? Ask God for grace to turn to him for help in the pressure moments that inevitably will come to you in the future.



the one about...
the boy
unmentioned

Adrian has retired from full-time teaching, but he does some supply work in secondary schools.

Like many a teacher, when he's set the pupils some work, he often walks up and down the class, pausing here and there at a desk. No doubt the pupils think he is glancing over their work. No doubt sometimes he is. But often he's praying for them by name. It takes something to do that, doesn't it? To remember that God loves every one of these people, that God answers prayer, and to pray and trust him for the answers, even though he is very unlikely to see any difference himself, or be able to tell anyone else that something amazing has happened ...



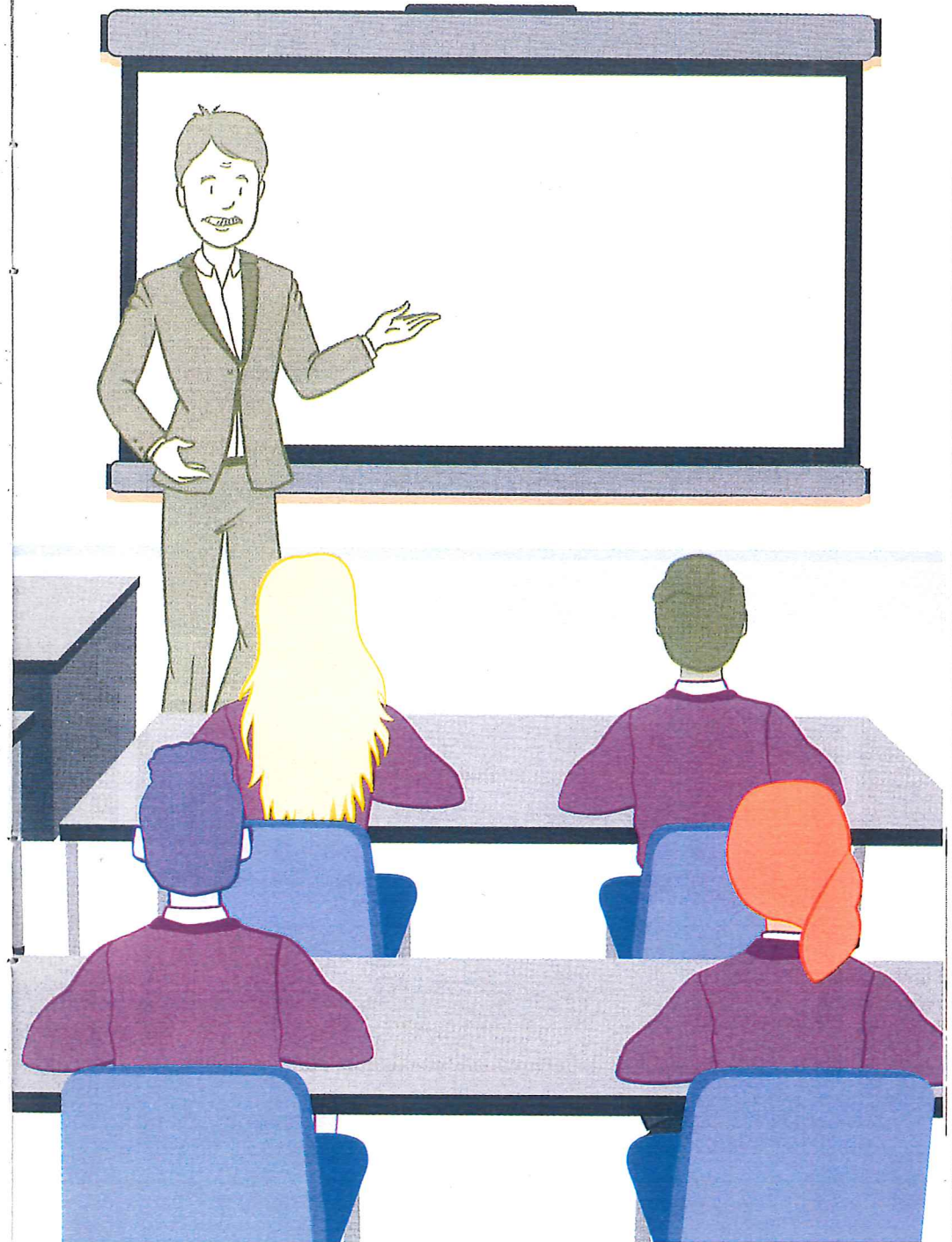
One day, like any other day, Adrian is in a class of 14-year-olds. He's set them some work. He walks up and down the class. He stops by one of the boys and begins to pray. And then he hears God say this to him: "No one has ever mentioned this boy's name to me before."

Imagine that. No one has ever mentioned this boy's name to God before. No health visitor prayed for him, no lollipop person, no doctor, no primary school teacher, no football coach, no sweetshop owner, no bus driver, no schoolfriend ... no one.

But God is listening – waiting, it seems, alert at that moment to the fact that at last someone lifted this person to his throne. Delighted.

God hears every prayer. God cares for every person. And your prayer for some person may be the only one anyone prays.

Only when Jesus returns will we get to see how he has worked through the things we regard as little things, and created, we hope and trust, something gloriously beautiful. ●



Day 11



Hope – right
where we are

READING

“Then Jacob woke from his sleep and said, ‘Surely the Lord is in this place – and I did not know it!’ And he was afraid, and said, ‘How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.’ ”

Genesis 28.16–17

REFLECTION

Sometimes we can fall into the trap of believing that God isn’t really interested in the places we spend our Monday-to-Saturday lives: our workplaces, our gyms, our shops, our clubs. We can suppose that we could be much more fruitful for him somewhere else other than at this desk, or this checkout, or this school gate. But where we are, God is – as God confirmed to Adrian in that classroom.

Jacob has stolen his brother Esau’s birthright and is fleeing for his life. At nightfall, he beds down in the hills with a stone for a pillow. God appears to

him in a dream, promising, “I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land.” When he wakes, Jacob acknowledges God’s presence and thinks of this place as particularly special – the gate of heaven – and names it Bethel, house of God.

But Jacob was wrong. It wasn’t that God dwelled in that particular spot a few miles north of Jerusalem, it was that God made Jacob aware of his presence there. God is with us wherever we are. That’s the promise. And therein lies the hope: where God is, possibilities abound. And so do impossibilities.

RESPONSE

Where do you spend time outside the home and church during the week? Ask God to bless those places, the people in them and the activities pursued there. Pray that you might be alert to God’s presence with you there and quick to respond to his promptings.

Day 12



Hope beyond our lifetime

READING

“Then all the people who were at the gate, along with the elders, said to Boaz, ‘We are witnesses. May the Lord make the woman who is coming into your house like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the house of Israel ... through the children that the Lord will give you by this young woman, may your house be like the house of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah.’”

Ruth 4.11–12

REFLECTION

Often when I think about the future I think about next week, next year or maybe five years’ time. I want the future to be bright but not too far away.

The prayer that the people of Bethlehem pray for Ruth and Boaz is a prayer that the impact of their lives would continue for generations. The prayer is answered. Ruth and Boaz become the great-grandparents of the great King David. And so in turn the direct ancestors of Jesus. God answered

their prayer but no one who prayed that prayer would have lived to see David crowned.

Yes, this is an encouragement to pray bold multi-generational prayers: for the great-grandchildren we will never see, or the regeneration of our town, or the transformation of our nation that may be a hundred years away. But it is also an encouragement to pray, like Adrian the teacher, for what we may never see ourselves: the conversion of a colleague who leaves, or of the mums and dads we’ll lose touch with when our kids start going to different schools ... We may not see them again but they will never be beyond God’s gaze.

RESPONSE

Think about the next generation in your family. What would you like to see God do in and for and through them after you’ve died? Do the same for your local church.

the one about...
the
stormtrooper



Valeri Iliev trades in hope. He's a plumber. 6' 3", built like a rugby player. The only thing wider than his shoulders is his smile. He walks into every job with that smile on his face. Initially, at least, the smile can be a little confusing to his clients – not surprisingly perhaps. After all, they have water coming through the ceiling, and this giant of a man is smiling. Still, as he tells them, "I'm here now, it's going to be OK." He's a hope-bringer. It's not just that he has the skill to deal with whatever comes his way, it is that he brings calm, confidence, peace into the situation. And an alertness to the people he serves – their emotional, physical, mental, spiritual state.



A month ago, the company he works for expanded into TV-installation and he found himself in the flat of a man in his 70s. The flat was full of *Star Wars* memorabilia. And he commented on it to the owner who it turned out had helped design the first stormtrooper. They talked for a while and as the conversation went on Val noticed a passing look of anguish on the man's face.

"Are you alright?"

"No," the man replied, "I've been diagnosed with lung cancer."

"I'm sorry to hear that. I wonder, would you mind if I prayed for you?" Val asked.

"I'm not sure where I am with God these days," the man said.

And Val replied, "Wherever you are with God, I can tell you that God loves you, and that he's for you."

And so they prayed. And, as Val left, there was peace in the man's eyes.

Hope kindled. ●



Day 13



Hope beyond our faith – almost

READING

“And they brought the boy to Jesus. When the spirit saw him, immediately it threw the boy into convulsions, and he fell on the ground and rolled about, foaming at the mouth. Jesus asked the father, ‘How long has this been happening to him?’ And he said, ‘From childhood. It has often cast him into the fire and into the water, to destroy him; but if you are able to do anything, have pity on us and help us.’”

Mark 9.20–22

REFLECTION

It’s easy to assume that the future will be like the present but more so. If things are good, things will get better. If things are bad, things will get worse: the boss will never change; the school gate will always be snipey, gossipy, whingy; our football teammates always a bit too fond of a bit too much alcohol, always a bit too prone to crossing the line from banter to attack.

Take Denise’s office. The atmosphere had always been backbitey, petty, acidic. Tough in a big organization,

worse in a small office. Denise wondered if it could ever change. She prayed. And then, because she often got in before anyone else, she decided to play worship music and sing and pray.

To pray is to kindle hope. It had seemed impossible but, slowly, the atmosphere in the office changed, relationships improved, things got better.

When the boy’s father says to Jesus, “If you are able to do anything ...” Jesus replies, “If you are able! – All things can be done for the one who believes.” The boy’s father responds, “I believe; help my unbelief!” Our hope lies not in how big our faith is but how big the God is in whom our mustard seed of faith nestles.

RESPONSE

Is there something in your life at home, at work, in the community that is not as you know God would like it to be but that you can’t ever see changing for the better? Bring it to your heavenly Father in prayer, and ask him for his help.

Day 14



The hope that we bring...

READING

"As he approached the gate of the town, a man who had died was being carried out. He was his mother's only son, and she was a widow; and with her was a large crowd from the town. When the Lord saw her, he had compassion for her and said to her, 'Do not weep.'"

Luke 7.12–13

REFLECTION

Whenever Jesus enters a situation, new possibilities abound. In this instance, a woman, not only emotionally (and in all probability economically) devastated by the death of her husband, suffers the terrible agony of losing her only son, and so, in effect, provision for her old age. Humanly, the situation is hopeless.

But not for Jesus.

Resurrections or divine resuscitations are rare, though people do still give testimony of such occurrences.

What is less rare is God bringing hope into all kinds of situations. And often through his people. After all, whenever someone with Christ's Spirit enters a situation, new possibilities abound. We not only have hope, we are called to carry that hope into our day out in the world ... as Valeri does.

Yes, we live in the certainty that in Christ there is life after death but we also know that he cares now, and may choose to act supernaturally, or indeed through our words and prayers and actions that carry the fragrance of beyond and bring hope to those around us.

RESPONSE

Is there someone you know who is in particular need of encouragement today?
What small thing could you do for them?
A text? A prayer? A card? A cup of coffee on their desk? A Kit Kat? A knock on their door?
Five minutes of your time?

Pray for them, too.