

I have a Greek friend, who is not a believer, who nevertheless from time to time asks me to pray for friends and family members. She has a sister in Athens who has an art gallery. One of the current exhibitions is Dionysos Mataragkas's work called "Ταξίδια του νου" or "Travels of the Mind".

Most of the works are heads, and where the face would be, we see instead an image of the trip of which they are dreaming: a train journey, or the view from an airplane window. One work simply shows the figure of a man sitting on a paper boat on the sea, his suitcase in the boat with him. There is one word on the side of the paper boat: *elpis*. Hope. The man puts his belongings in a paper boat and sets out on the water in a radical act of hope.

Like other people attempting to make even more perilous journeys across water. They set out in the hope of a better life. They believe that more is possible. There's a similar hope that's driving forward the women who make their way to the tomb that first Easter morning.

Why do they go? They certainly don't expect to find the body gone and hear that Jesus is risen.

It's partly their tradition that leads them to go, and perhaps a sense of duty. But there is something more at play: a belief that through their act of love in anointing Jesus's body with spices, they will somehow make this dreadful situation a little bit better.

They have hope that what they will do will have some effect, bring some dignity, show some respect. Their actions will leave the situation better than they found it.

Going there that Easter morning is a radical act of hope that something more is possible, that something can be done that goes part of the way towards redeeming a situation.

The Czech playwright, dissident and statesman Václav Havel said: "*hope... is not the same as joy that things are going well. Or willingness to invest in enterprises that are obviously headed for early success. But, rather, an ability to work for something because it is good, not just because it stands a chance to succeed.*"

Hope is definitely not the same thing as optimism. It is not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something makes sense, regardless of how it turns out."

Perhaps that's the kind of hope the women had on Easter morning. Perhaps that's the kind of hope that causes people to set out in small boats, or to help them. Or that lies behind my Greek friend asking me to pray.

But post-resurrection Christian hope is something more. It is rooted in faith in the risen Jesus Christ, who is before all things, and in whom all things hold together. That is what drives on the believer and gives them courage. We are in Christ Jesus, and nothing, nothing can separate us from the love of God in him. And the truth that nothing can separate us is founded on, is because of, Christ's resurrection.

It's because when the women got to the tomb, it was empty. It's because angels said to them, "He is not here. He has risen!" It's because, as Peter recounts in Acts, Jesus appeared to them, and ate and drank with them.

If there had been no resurrection, sin would have won and death would be the last word. The tragedy of Good Friday, that dreadful situation, would have remained dreadful – yes, with a body in a tomb with a little more dignity, thanks to those women, but still dreadful.

But Christ is risen from the dead. And that is the basis of Christian hope. Because of the resurrection, we know that Jesus has overcome the greatest powers of darkness in the world, the powers of sin and death. Because of the resurrection, we know that there is no limit to the power and extent of his love.

That is why the Christian faith is life-changing stuff. It overcomes fear, tempers despair. Makes people do big things, small things, crazy things: like leave everything and follow Jesus and love people with his love. Because we can hope and trust in him who has called us and who is faithful. Who keeps his promises for ever. This is Christian hope.

It is because of Peter's experience of the resurrection, his knowledge of the Father's love, in the risen Christ, through the Holy Spirit, that Peter has the confidence to preach the good news as we heard it from Acts today. Peter does so in a firm hope that God will convert hearts. That people will listen.

And people do believe. God keeps his promises. big time. If we were to read on in Acts, we would read that the Holy Spirit falls on everyone who heard the words. The gospel is spread throughout the world, through believers who hope that God will convert hearts and people will listen.

When my husband and I first met, he was not a Christian. Nor when we got married, although he was happy for us to get married in church. For 17 years, I hoped that he would come to faith. Sometimes I prayed more than I did other times. Other people were praying too, and I was glad of that, because I didn't always pray. But I always hoped.

He described his experience as like being outside a building where there's a party going on, but not knowing the code to open the door. One day in 2017, he woke up and found that he was at the party.

Praise God! And God also worked through the ministry of ordinary Spirit-filled believers in the church we were part of at the time. Who, in radical acts of hope, prayed for us, reached out to us, did life with us, because they believed that God, who in the risen Christ has defeated sin and death, is faithful and keeps his promises.

When the women went to the tomb, they didn't expect to hear that Jesus is risen. But when you took the decision to come to church on Easter Day, you probably did expect to hear that. So what effect does hearing that Jesus is risen have on you? How might it translate into renewed hope in your life?

Jürgen Moltmann, in his classic *The Theology of Hope*, says this: "*In human beings, knowledge of the living God awakens a thirst and hunger for life. It makes them dissatisfied with what they are, and impels them to look for a future in which more life will enter the lives they already have.*"

So if, like me, you struggle with acceptance and long to see change, take comfort from Moltmann's work. The question is this: since Christ is risen from the dead, what are you, what are we, going to do out of the hope that we have in him?

In the early church, what people did out of hope was be baptised on Easter Day. Baptised into the new life of the risen Christ, and into his body, the Church. In a moment, we are going to renew the vows we made at baptism, or the vows that were made on our behalf. If you are not baptised, try those words out. See how they feel to you. And come and tell me how you get on. I'd love to hear.

Actually, even if you are baptised, try saying them as if it's for the first time. See how they feel to you. Perhaps you find yourself wanting to make a new commitment to Christ. To turn to him afresh, or again, or in a new kind of way. With more expectation. More hope. And if that's you, you are very welcome to come and tell me about it, or Catriona. We'd love to hear your story and to pray with you.

Let us pray. Jesus, risen Master and triumphant Lord, we thank you for the life-giving news of your resurrection. Give us a greater knowledge of you today, that impels us to work for a future with more life, more of you, sure and confident in the hope to which you have called us, the riches of your glorious inheritance, and the immeasurable greatness of your power, for us who believe. Amen.

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