

9th November 2025 – Twenty-second Sunday after Pentecost

2 Thessalonians 2:1-5, 13-17

LIVING HOPE

Have you ever been in a situation which made you feel like you had lost all hope? It might be that you had been in a storm, either on the sea or elsewhere, and the power of nature made you feel extremely weak and vulnerable. It may have been when you lost a family member or close friend, or a relationship broke down, or you were under financial pressure of some kind. Perhaps you or someone very close to you suffered a bad injury or was going through a very bad health issue. There are lots of things that can make us feel hopeless, aren't there? Situations or events over which we feel we have no control, but they can potentially severely affect our lives and the lives of those we love. And, for at least some of us, our imaginations can take over as the possible scenarios which play out in our minds aren't necessarily the ones with the best outcomes. That feeling of hopelessness; of facing a situation over which we feel we have no control, but which could severely affect our lives and the lives of those we love.

Recently I watched a show in which some of the survivors of the 1998 Sydney to Hobart yacht race were interviewed. You might remember that this was the worst race in that event's history, with bad weather causing six sailors to lose their lives, and another 57 having to be rescued at sea. As some of these sailors were being interviewed, it was interesting to see those who lost crewmates in that race still showing the effect the trauma of their hopelessness caused them. They spent a long time stuck on a small life raft in the ocean, not knowing if anyone had any idea where they were. But one of them talked, with so much hope and relief still today nearly 27 years later, about when they were rescued. He said as they were floating in their flimsy life raft they heard a plane, but they had been hallucinating so much by that stage no one took any notice. But then the plane dropped a handheld radio near them. When they retrieved it, they were told that a navy ship

would reach them in about 20 minutes. At that point a channel 7 news helicopter flew up and hovered over them. He said that then he turned to the others with him in the raft and said, 'We have a navy ship on the way, and a channel 7 chopper overhead, we're actually gonna make it!' Imagine how they would have felt when their utter hopelessness was turned around into a sure and certain hope.

What is the feeling like for us when no hope, becomes one hope?

We know that even in our lives as Christians, even when we have faith in God, in His love for us, in His care and protection for us, we can still have times when we feel we are without hope. And that was also the case for Christians just after Jesus went back to heaven, which is why we have the words of hope and comfort in our reading for today. These people were being persecuted because of their faith, and they were living their lives according to beliefs which many of their family, friends, and neighbours didn't share with them. To make things even harder, there were some who were teaching that by their interpretations of the 'signs' Jesus had already come again but because they hadn't been a part of that they had obviously missed the boat. They had the things in life, just like we do, which actively attacked their hope, and they had people, both believers and nonbelievers, who seemed happy to pull that hope down as well. Mmmm, sound familiar?

It's interesting that, in writing to these early Christians to rebuild their hope, Paul doesn't directly correct the false teachings, but he points to the hope we have in Jesus. In verse 1 here he writes, 'When our Lord Jesus returns, we will be gathered up to meet him.' We *will be* gathered up to meet Him, no doubt about that. This is where our hope becomes a certainty. And then down the bottom of our reading, 'God our Father loves us. He treats us with undeserved grace and has given us eternal comfort and a wonderful hope. We pray that our Lord Jesus Christ and God our Father will encourage you and help you always to do and say the right thing.' (16,17) In the midst of all they are facing, the uncertainty, the hardship, the persecution, the despair, in God's love for them in Jesus they are given hope.

If we go to the picture of our lives being like a boat sailing on a rough sea, what is stirring up the waves for you right now? What are the worries, the conflicts, the doubts, the anxieties, which threaten your hope? Maybe you don't have any concerns right you now, you're sailing on a calm sea, and if that's the case, that's great. If so, can you think of a time you did feel like that. Or perhaps your 'seas' are just a little bit rough, or the waves are starting to build up, or maybe, even in one area of your life, they feel overwhelming. What causes that for us? Like the people this letter was first written to, it can really get to us when those we love, family, friends, etc, don't share our faith, maybe even make it hard for us to live our faith. What will happen to them? Conflict or a breakdown in a relationship can cause those waves to rise up. And then, again, there's the worries about finances, work, the future. Grief for those no longer with us, loneliness, worries over health concerns for ourselves or others. The waves can be high causing us to feel that we are on a small life raft being hopelessly tossed around.

In the midst of what we face in life comes our hope. I referred earlier to the feelings of the sailor when he realised that help was coming and he and the others would no longer be stuck in a small life raft on a big sea; the relief, the hope, this brought to them. There are many things which can cause us to lose hope, to turn away, but the hope God gives to us in Jesus is always there for us. This hope is the ship which comes to our rescue when we feel overwhelmed, about to go under, or even when we just feel that moving forward is a bit harder than it normally is. It's the hope we hear of in God's Word, when we are reminded of God's love for us, a love that is with us in all we go through. It's the hope of our Baptism, when we are joined to God's love and He says to us, 'I will never leave you'. It's the hope that we see, touch, taste, when in Holy Communion in a real and physical way we are joined to Jesus's death and resurrection for us, the event which helps us to know that we really do have hope in Him. It's the hope we know is with us always, both in the rough seas and the calm, as we face and deal with the things which are a part of our life.

But, as much as we trust this 'ship', as much as we know we can always have hope and trust in God, things can still overwhelm us at times. Feeling guilty about this is one of the things

which can threaten our hope. It's also made harder for us when people tell us that when we have faith life will be smooth sailing, so if we are going through a rough time maybe we're not believing and trusting enough. That's never one of God's promises. The hard times will happen, that's a part of our life and our world. Sometimes we will feel that with God's help we can go on and sail right through them. At others we feel they threaten to swamp us and we wonder how we will get through. That's when we need this reminder that, from God through Jesus, we have a living hope, a certainty which does not let us down. When we feel we can't keep holding on Him, He is there coming to us.

Most of the time, I pray, you do feel hope in your life. But it's good to acknowledge that there are those times and situations which challenge us, and also those which can straight out overwhelm us. It's then that we need to be reminded of the hope we have through Jesus. It's a hope that gives us relief, comfort, and strength. It's the strongest and most certain hope anyone can have in their lives, as it brings us the guarantee of God's love, His forgiveness, His care. It's a hope which changes how we live our lives, and which we can now go and share so others can know it also. Amen.

FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION/REFLECTION

- Can you think of any situations, from either the news or that you know of from others, when people found hope in a situation which seemed utterly hopeless? How do you think the people in those situations would have felt?
- Have you ever been in a situation in which, in any area of your life, you felt there was no hope, only to have that turned around? How did that feel for you?
- Are there any things which give you 'rough seas', ie, threaten your peace and hope in life? How do you deal with them? How does your faith in God's love, and the grace and peace we receive through Jesus, help you at these times?
- Take time to reflect on what the hope God gives us means to you in your life. When do you struggle to feel it? What threatens it? How can you help others to know this hope also?

Pray: Thank God for the love He gives us in Jesus. Ask Him to help us, in whatever we face in life, to hold on to the hope we can only find in Him.

*Pastor Andrew R. Koehler
09.11.2025*