

Sermon for Online Rose Queen Service: Pott Shrigley 21st June 2020.

Rev David Swales

Romans 8.31-35,37-end. *A Certain Hope*

Some of you know Pott Shrigley well: you come here every day for school, or every Sunday to church; or you live or visit here.

But some of you who are with us today may never have been to our lovely village: I hope one day you will. It's one of those places which, on the outside, looks as if nothing has changed for many years. If someone from the 1800s were to come back today, they would instantly recognise the Pott Shrigley they knew. And you can see this for yourself if you look at old photos of the church, village hall and school, and the surrounding houses and lanes.

And I suppose traditions like our Rose Queen Festival add to that sense of timelessness; of a place where nothing changes.

Well, it's good to have some things which connect us with our past, with the community as it has been over the years; some things which stay the same in this fast-changing world. But Pott Shrigley, as much as any other place, is a community which looks forwards more than it looks backwards. Take our school: it's a place for our children to develop into people who fulfil their God-given potential. In that sense, schools are always looking into the future; into what our children and young people will *become*. Indeed, at the moment we are very much praying for all those involved in our schools; we pray that no young person's future may be adversely affected by the current upheaval and disruption, and we pray for those who carry heavy responsibilities to find the right way forward.

The same goes for the church; we certainly have a foot in the past – some of the beautiful words and music we use in our services have been used by generations of worshippers; and we love our ancient building, too. But the church, as the people of God, is all about looking forward; like a group of pilgrims, travelling into the unknown, but confident that God will lead them.

In fact, this year as a church we had planned to undertake a process called 'Upward and Onward': a time of listening and discernment on the way forward for St Christopher's; a process I described as 'building for the future'. So, yes, our community is rooted in the past, but is reaching out to the future. But, hang on: the future is a scary place! You never know what terrors lurk round the corner. After all, which of us saw the devastating Coronavirus pandemic coming. Do we *have* to look to the future? Couldn't we just take refuge in the re-assuring familiarity of the past – Rose Queen Festival, quaint village surroundings, and all?!

Well, we have no choice but to face the future. And the secret is not to *hide* from it, but to *face* the future; to face it not with fear, but with *Hope*.

In everyday speech, hope tends to mean: hoping for the best, crossing your fingers, wishing that things might work out – whilst fearing that they won't. Christian Hope is completely different. It is a *certain* hope, built on the solid promises of God, and the solid facts of Jesus' death and resurrection.

Our reading today is a triumphant statement of that kind of Hope. St Paul wrote:

If God is for us, who can be against us? Who can separate us from the love of Christ? I am certain that nothing can separate us from his love: neither death nor life, neither angels nor other heavenly rulers or powers, neither the present nor the future, neither the world above nor the world below; there is nothing in all creation that will ever be able to separate us from the love of God, which is ours through Christ Jesus our Lord.

Whatever life may throw at us, St Paul affirms, we are safe and secure if we place ourselves in God's hands. That is Real Hope. My prayer is that today you will make it your hope.