

Hope

I heard a sermon on Hope last Sunday. I didn't really understand it to be honest, and I'm not sure why our minister preached on it! I mean – I'm great at hope! It's one of the things I'm best at; listen...

I hope I score a goal next Tuesday in football.

I hope the video recorder taped Doctor Who last night.

I hope I remembered to turn the oven on before I came out or the chicken won't be cooked when I get home.

I hope all my hair doesn't fall out when I get old.

I hope I score two goals next Tuesday in football.

I hope it doesn't rain all through the Easter holidays like it usually does.

I hope the kids remembered to feed the guinea pigs before they came out this evening.

I hope the car passes it's MOT on Monday.

I hope I score three goals next Tuesday in football.

You see – nine things off the top of my head. Just like that without any problem. I've got no problems with hope – so what on earth was this guy preaching about hope for? I mean if he *has* to preach, and I suppose he does, or he won't get paid the full whack – why doesn't he preach on something difficult like....erm....I dunno....something no-one understands like the dichotomy between individual freewill versus divine predestination. I mean I'd give the guy a hefty bonus to explain that in a simple 20 minute sermon. Heck! I'd even allow him two twenty minute sermons and some PowerPoint slides. That'd be worth turning up every Sunday for. But hope! That's easy – as I just demonstrated.

OK I know what you're thinking – a sharp audience like you would easily spot the obvious flaw. I knew I couldn't trick you. Three out of those nine things I listed were really just the same thing – scoring goals in football. Now to you maybe that's no big deal. But when you've been born with two left feet and all the grace and skill of an elderly orang-utan, just getting a touch of the ball can be the highlight of your week – let alone scoring. And notice I wasn't greedy, I didn't hope to be scoring the winning goal with the last kick of the match for Liverpool against Everton in the FA Cup final did I? I mean I kept it realistic. Obviously now that I'm not just knocking on the door of forty but the door has been opened and I've been cordially invited across the threshold into a land flowing with corduroy slacks, elasticated waistbands and fleece lined moccasins I understand that the Liverpool Manager is very unlikely to be rolling out the red carpet for me. No the thing about hope – as I understand it is to remain realistic. My old Dad always used to say to me "Son - Shoot for the moon. Even if you miss, you'll land amongst the stars." Ahhh. It's lovely that isn't it? Inspirational, poetic even. No – it's not! It just displays his total ignorance of the fundamentals of astronomy, rocketry

and geography. Kennedy Space centre is in Florida so really if you fire your rocket at the moon from there and miss – the best you should really hope for is a soft squishy landing in the alligator infested swamps of the wetlands! The stars are another 24.3 trillion miles away! Thanks for that Dad. Not very realistic is it? Got any other advice for me? I hope not! See look at that – more hope. Easy peasy – lemon squeezy! You’ve got to be realistic and not indulge in silly speculative wishful thinking and unfounded optimism! Get real. Get grounded. Get a good healthy dose of common sense. That’s what we all need.

Anyway where was I – oh yes hope. As I said I’m really good at that already. It’s the complicated stuff I need a hand with – like evangelism – that’s really really hard! Dave & Tony, two of my friends at work, and I were talking the other day – they all know I’m a Christian, I wear a silver fish badge on my lapel, I have a little red Gideon’s New Testament in the glove box of my company car and I always give up pancakes for lent (I think that’s right – I’m a bit hazy on that one, if I’m honest – but better safe than sorry is what I always say – keep the pancakes for later). Anyway they were saying that Mark, the boss, is back on the Prozac, Joyce from Accounts is probably going to be made redundant in the latest round of ‘down-sizing’ and none of us is going to get even a cost-of-living rise this financial year – the company is really in the doo-doo. Dave said he was really worried about his position ‘cos he’s so new, last-in, first-out. Tony’s wife was thinking she’d have to go back to work just to make ends meet. So I thought I’d help them out – you know with a bit of the helpful Christian stuff. Not the complicated things – obviously – they’re not ready for transubstantiation vs. consubstantiation or anything like that. So I told them “Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?” – That really got them thinking so I followed it up with “Always look on the bright side of life!” – it’s funny how this stuff just pop into your head when you need it isn’t it – although now I come to think about it that second might be “Monty Python” rather than the Bible. Strangely Dave and Tony both just fell about laughing and said that’s what they liked about me – I didn’t take my faith too seriously! I was horrified – I explained that I do take my faith VERY seriously. So they asked me what good it did me.... And I’ve been thinking about that ever since. What good is my faith? What *good* is my faith? What *is* my faith? I’ve looked it up.

“Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.”

So there’s that word hope again. So do I have faith that I’ll really score three goals at the Keep-Fit football on Tuesday night? No not really. Do I have faith that my hair won’t fall out when I get older? No not really. Do I have faith that the car will pass it’s MOT? No, not really but I really *really* hope it does.

So if faith isn’t being sure of that list of nine or seven (whichever way you want to look at it) things I’ve been hoping for I suppose I’d better find out what my hope really is. ‘Cos Dave and Tony, Mark, Joyce and the rest of them at work are all worried sick and they need something to be certain of and at the moment it’s something that they sure can’t see without me to show them.