

Hosea 2:14-15

14 “Therefore I am now going to allure her; I will lead her into the wilderness and speak tenderly to her. 15 There I will give her back her vineyards, and will make the Valley of Achor a door of hope. There she will respond as in the days of her youth, as in the day she came up out of Egypt.

Hebrews 11:1-3

11 Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. 2 This is what the ancients were commended for. 3 By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible

Upon our arrival, I began doing a little study of the word “valley” in the Bible.

And alongside that, everywhere Rachel and I went, we seemed to hear the same word in completely different settings.

Newness.

Again and again, the same verse seemed to appear:

“See, I am doing a new thing!
Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?
I am making a way in the wilderness
and streams in the wasteland.”

Isaiah 43:19

So it was encouraging that at the beginning of Wednesday night worship, when people were asked whether they sensed God saying anything, there was a moment of silence.

And then someone said:

“God is doing a new thing. A new beginning.”
I sense God doing this:
In us as individuals
In us as a community
In us as a church
In us as a nation.

But it raises the question:

What is the new thing God is doing?
And as I’ve been studying the valleys of Scripture, one particular verse has spoken to me:

“The valley of Achor will become a door of hope.”

Hosea 2:15

Achor means trouble, calamity.

So God is saying something extraordinary:

The valley of trouble will become a door of hope.

And that is what I want us to think about this morning

First.

We all have valleys

1. *We all have valleys*

Everyone needs hope.

And hope is closely connected to faith.

Hebrews says:

“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”

Faith and hope belong together.

Faith looks to God and says, “I trust you.”

Hope looks to the future and says, “Because I trust God, I can face what is coming.”

We all have valleys.

A lost job.

A difficult marriage.

A challenging child.

A sudden death

A disappointment that you never saw coming.

Sometimes the valley is something that has happened to us.

Sometimes, as in Hosea, it is something that has happened because of our own failure.

And sometimes it is both.

Hosea is a deeply uncomfortable book.

God uses the picture of an unfaithful marriage to describe Israel's unfaithfulness to him.

Hosea is told to marry the prostitute called Gomer, who is unfaithful to him. And yet, when she leaves, God tells Hosea to go and bring her back.

It is a picture of the gospel.

God is the bridegroom.

We are invited to become his bride.

And that is why human betrayal can be so devastating.

An affair.

A divorce.

A parent who walks away.

A child who turns their back.

A friend who lets us down

Someone who promised they would be there — and wasn't.

Disappointment is so crushing.

There is something particularly painful about having your hopes raised and then having them dashed.

The people of Israel knew something about that.

The name Achor takes us back to Joshua 7.

Israel had experienced a great victory at Jericho. But Achan secretly took things that God had said should be destroyed.

Israel then suffered a humiliating defeat at Ai.

Achan's deceit is discovered

Joshua then says:

"Why have you brought this trouble on us?"

And the place became known as the valley of trouble.

So when Hosea says:

“I will make the valley of Achor a door of hope”

His listeners would have immediately understood the irony.

The place associated with trouble is going to become a place associated with hope.

And this is where we come to the second thing.

2. God can turn a valley into a door

Look at what God says in Hosea.

After all Israel's failure, God says:

**“Therefore I am now going to allure her;
I will lead her into the wilderness
and speak tenderly to her.”**

And then:

**“I will give her back her vineyards
and will make the valley of Achor a door of hope.”**

This is extraordinary.

Hope is not offered because Israel has suddenly becomes good and holy.

Hope is offered because God is merciful.

That is the gospel.

God doesn't simply get Israel out of the valley.

He transforms the valley into a door.

I believe this is a word for our parish.

Pause.

You may look at your own story and think:

“That was the place where everything went wrong.”

But God may be saying:

“I’m still writing your story - stick with me.”

God can take the places where your story went wrong and make them places where a new story begins.

That doesn’t mean God calls evil good.

It doesn’t mean we pretend that pain wasn’t painful.

It doesn’t mean every tragedy has an easy explanation.

But it does mean that God is not finished.

The valley can become a door.

And how do you walk through that door?

Faith.

Faith means trusting someone.

And the crucial question is: who are you trusting?

It isn’t the sincerity of your faith that saves you.

It is the object of your faith.

You can have enormous faith but in the wrong thing.

You can have faith in your reputation.

Your CV.

Your money.

Your relationships.

Your political ideology.

Even your spirituality.

But none of those things can save you.

Jesus alone saves.

I was watching cliff diving recently with our boys on the Red Bull channel.

Absolutely amazing .

Imagine I decided told our boys 'Daddy is going to have a go' — but I didn't quite clear the cliff, injured myself, and ended up in the water struggling to stay afloat.

I shout up to boys on the platform:

"I need something to hold on to!"

And they shout back:

"Dad, we've got an anvil and we've got a life jacket. Which one do you want?"

And I shout back:

"It doesn't matter! Either will work!"

The truth is they won't will they.

Only one will save me. The other is no good. If I hold on to the anvil I'm sinking into the deep.

The object of your faith matters.

You can have tremendous faith

But the anvil simply won't save you.

You need the life jacket.

And the same is true spiritually.

It isn't enough to have faith.

The question is: what have you is your faith in?

Actually the question is Who

Your spouse

Your doctor

Your stockbroker.

Or have you placed your faith in Jesus?

Do you love Jesus?

Have you trusted Jesus?

Have you allowed yourself to be embraced by Jesus?

Because Jesus saves and redeems.

3. *Hope gives us courage for tomorrow*

Let me tell you a story from my own family.

There has been quite a lot about Eton in the papers recently as - the grandson of our patron - Prince George - begins his time there.

My paternal grandfather went to Eton.

So did my father.

But I never met my grandfather.

After the war, he came to collect my father from Eton, who was fifteen years old — his only son.

But he didn't come alone.

He came with his lover.

When he eventually died, he left all his wealth and possessions to her.

Unsurprisingly- that post-war infidelity hit my father like a train.

And sadly resulted in my father never seeing his father again until his was on his deathbed.

My grandfather didn't come to my father's wedding.

He never met my mother.

He never met me.

He never met my sister.

But there was another occasion in the early 1970s when things seemed to thaw a little.

My father and grandfather made plans to meet.

And at the very last moment, my grandfather cancelled.

He had something more important to do.

My father's hope was dashed.

And yet, somehow, my father had found a hope that his father couldn't destroy.

Because my father had placed his faith in Jesus.

During the Korean War, my dad was shot down and became a prisoner of war.

And alongside him was an army chaplain called Sam Davis.

Sam shared the gospel with my father and all the other troops - most were Americans

My dad had been given an army missal by an American airman just before he was shot down.

I still have it.

And in that Korean prison camp, my father's own valley of trouble became a door of hope.

The very place where life seemed to have gone so badly wrong became a place where God began something new.

That is what hope does.

Hope doesn't deny the valley.

Hope gives you courage to walk through it.

And that is why Hebrews says faith is:

**"the assurance of things hoped for,
the conviction of things not seen."**

Faith is the future with God that visits us in the present.

God takes us by the hand and walks with us into the future.

We don't know what the future holds.

But we know the one who holds the future.

There are three possible responses when we face an uncertain future:

Fear:

"I don't know what to do, so I'll retreat."

Folly:

"I'll just charge ahead and hope for the best."

Or:

Faith:

“I don’t know exactly what is coming, but I know who is coming with me.”

And that changes how we live now.

Think about Caleb and Joshua.

Twelve spies went into the promised land.

Ten came back with pessimism.

But Caleb and Joshua saw something different.

They saw the fruitfulness of the land.

They believed that God could give it to them.

They could see hope ahead.

And because they could see hope ahead, they could stand and fight confidently in the present.

Numbers 13 gives us this wonderful picture and is one of my valley verses:

“When they reached the Valley of Eshkol, they cut off a branch bearing a cluster of grapes. Two of them carried it on a pole between them...”

The valley contained fruit.

For a church who have not had a Rector for some time you have so many clusters of fruitfulness

The BCP and Parish Comm
the VW cluster
The evensong cluster
The cameo cluster
The Cafe Church cluster

And there will be more clusters that birth.

There was promise on the other side.

And perhaps that is something God wants to say to us as a church.

This parish is a door of hope for so many.

And ultimately, the valley of Achor points us towards another valley.

Look at Jesus on the cross.

The cross is where trouble and hope meet.

It looked like defeat.

It looked like the end.

It looked like God had abandoned his Son.

But the cross became the place from which salvation flowed.

The place of death became the place of life.

The place of apparent defeat became the place of ultimate victory.

The valley became a door.

And so I want to leave you with this picture:

The valley of Achor becomes a door of hope.

Perhaps you are in a valley today.

Perhaps you are carrying disappointment.

Perhaps there is something in your past that still hurts.

Perhaps there is something in your family that has never been resolved.

Perhaps you are frightened about the future.

Perhaps you don't know what God is doing.

The promise of Scripture is not:

"You will never have a valley."

The promise is:

"The valley does not have the final word."

Because God is merciful.

God is faithful.

God is still at work.

And in Jesus Christ, the valley can become a door.

A door into a new beginning.

A door into restoration.

A door into hope.

So what is the new thing God is doing?

I don't know all the answers.

But I believe this:

God is still making ways in the wilderness.

He is still making streams in the wasteland.

He is still turning valleys of trouble into doors of hope.

And our response is faith.

To take his hand.

To trust him.

To walk with him.

And to discover that even when we cannot see the road ahead,

we know the one who holds the future.

**"The Lord is compassionate and gracious,
slow to anger, abounding in love.
As a father has compassion on his children,
so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him."**

Psalm 103:8, 13

Your valley is not necessarily the end of your story.

It may become the door through which God begins a new one.

Amen