**Step Forward Day. Ephesians 1:15-22**

I trust that today has been a really helpful day for you in exploring God’s calling, discerning his call to you and what that might look like within the Church of England.

As you are on this journey I hope that you have people praying for you as you seek to discern. Often people will ask ‘what can I pray’. It’s good to give people specific requests but how about asking them to pray this prayer in Ephesians for you.

Paul prays amidst all the things he could have prayed that “with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe,”

After a whole day of thinking about calling, what is my calling to, how do I hear God; all key questions to ask – I want to remind us of our first calling to know the **hope** we have in Christ.

After a day of asking the question – what do I have to offer? I want to encourage each one of us that what we have within us is something that the world is longing for.

There is an awful lot of hopelessness around us. Those who cannot see any good in life. Those who have simply given up. Those who seek pleasure in numerous things simply to hide the lack of hope they feel deep within.

We have hope.

The word hope is often used in a very vague way, to express a wish about something which we’ve no idea the outcome of – I hope it doesn’t snow before I drive home today, I hope England win the rugby tomorrow....

But this is a vague thing, hope based on wishful thinking. Not on any certainty but on unfounded optimism often. But this hope that we have is based on the God who keeps his promises. It is based on the truth of Jesus living, dying and being raised to new life, on his defeat of death that you and I might know life in all its fullness.

This deep sense of hope that brings a sense of security, of joy, of purpose – is what we have to offer a world in need.

A columnist in the independent was recently waxing lyrical about the beauty of seeing snowdrops appear. They wrote “I’ve long thought about this and I don’t think it is simply their pure beauty, it’s to do with their timing, appearing as they do when the earth is still under the lock and key of winter. They’re the first sign of something else, an undeniable signal that the warm days will come again, and I’m sure they fill me with elation because what I am looking at, against the dead tones of the winter earth, is Hope, suddenly and unmistakably manifest in white.”

Hope – we can’t live without it. It is a staying power in the midst of the harshest of winters. Through the spirit life has been poured out into us – we’ve received the first fruit and are sustained in hope in waiting for that which we don’t yet have.

In this season of insecurity, collectively we can share hope.

How we ask do I share it? Do I have the gifts to be able to share it? Paul then prays that the Ephesians would know the power, “the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power. God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places,”

The same power that raised Jesus from he dead available to you and I today!

So often we are aware of our weaknesses, our failings, our inadequacy – and you know that’s actually a good place to be because in that place we rely on the God who every time we are asked to step forward into the unknown equips us with his power.

We have something to offer and we have the resources by which to offer it.

And today is simply about trying to work out the context in which we do that.

In this journey of exploring and of pushing doors and seeking God’s direction – our focus needs to be on what’s next, on stepping forward into what God has for us, but don’t forget in the looking forward that God has a calling on you today to know and share that hope.

Who is he asking you at this moment to be sharing something of the hope to which we have been called with?

My prayer is along with the prayer in Ephesians that

‘The God of hope will fill you with joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit (Romans 15:13)

That we might be, like those snowdrops, signs of hope in this world.