

## Hope and Peace

By Judy Taylor



Recently, I watched a programme called The Road to Hope. BBC journalist Fergal Keane has spent 40 years witnessing the worst that humanity can do – genocide, war, and famine. There was a period in his life when he had to withdraw from reporting, he had witnessed so much suffering, so many atrocities that his health took a toll. I've often wondered how any of the journalists who report in areas around the world of extreme suffering and conflict manage their own emotions after a long period of this kind of reporting. And yet, in this programme, whilst acknowledging the terrible circumstances he was witnessing, he found remarkable evidence of people who in spite of all that they were enduring held on to hope and found a way to keep going. A little girl in war torn Gaza who was suffering from a dreadful disease which caused some of her limbs to die. A doctor there said if she did not get treatment to amputate these limbs she would die. After many false hopes Israel finally granted permission for her to be transferred to Jordan where hospital doctors could operate. We saw this poor little girl crying in pain before she went and then arriving in Jordan. Some time later Fergal Keane went to Jordan to see how she was. This dear little girl, about two years old was smiling sitting up wearing a pretty dress and looking so happy. She had lost both arms and a leg but just kept smiling and when the King of Jordan visited her, she smiled so much and offered him her arm to shake. Her mother had been allowed to stay with her and how happy she must have felt to have her child alive and see her so full of life now. A real story of hope in the midst of terrible suffering.

Fergal Keane said that what he witnessed in Rwanda was the worst of all he had ever experienced but he told of a lorry carrying orphaned children who were being driven to a safer place but everything depended when they were stopped on the road checks and if the guards would let them through. Concealed in this lorry was a mother and her teenage daughter. The orphaned children sat on them to hide them and thankfully they were not discovered. The lorry made it through to safety to Burundi and hope of a new life for all of them. Fergal Keane returned years later to see how the mother and daughter were; he and other journalists had accompanied them on this dangerous journey. Her delight in seeing him was evident in the long extended hug they had.

Hope amid so much suffering but amazing evidence of hope nevertheless. These stories and others clearly gave Fergal hope himself that the human spirit can endure and overcome in some of the most impossible situations. Today, in these awful times of war, hatred, greed and racism we need to have hope and we have one who gives us this hope, our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus lived through just such turbulent times and knew how it could lead to despair and hopelessness among his people. He came to give hope to the world, to bring good news to those who were so in need of love and forgiveness. But he was and is the Prince of Peace and as we know, this peace was the price he paid with his life.

Finally, I would like to share with you a part of a chapter of a book by Henri Nouwen. He was a Dutch, Catholic Priest and remains one of the most popular writers on spirituality today. This is from his book "Finding My Way Home"

"Do not give up working for peace. Always remember that the peace for which you work is not of this world. Do not let yourself be distracted by the great noises of war, the dramatic descriptions of misery, and the sensational expressions of human cruelty. The newspapers, movies, and war novels may make you numb, but they do not create in you a true desire for peace. They tend to create feelings of shame, guilt and powerlessness, and these feelings are the worst motives for peace work. Keep your eyes on the prince of peace, the one who doesn't cling to his divine power, the one who refuses to turn stones into bread, jump from great heights and rule with great power; the one who says 'Blessed are the poor, the gentle, those who mourn, and those who hunger and thirst for righteousness; blessed are the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers and those who are persecuted in the cause of uprightness' (Matt. 5:3-11) See the one who touches the lame, the crippled. And the blind; the one who speaks words of forgiveness and encouragement, the one who dies alone, rejected and despised. Keep your eyes on him who becomes poor, weak with the weak, and who is rejected with the rejected. That one, Jesus, is the source of all peace."