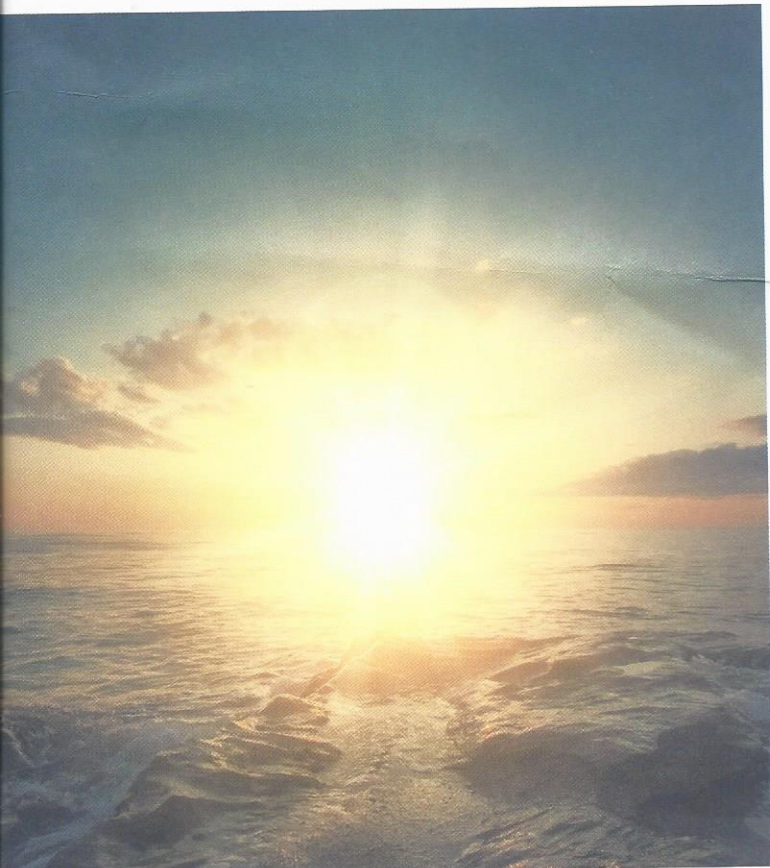


# Heavenly hope



Lord, thank you for hope, for heaven, and for the here and now. Keep me focused on this, and help me to keep the flame flickering, even on days of dark doubt. Amen.

## Sea Sunday

by Lisa Tulfer

Today you will use something which has been brought to you by ship – food, fuel, consumer goods. Over ninety per cent of world trade is carried by a fleet of over fifty thousand ships, crewed by 1.5 million seafarers, who may face dangerous working conditions, isolation, separation from their families and the real threat of piracy.

Sea Sunday is supported by the Mission to Seafarers ([www.missiontoseafarers.org](http://www.missiontoseafarers.org)),

which supports seafarers and their families in two hundred ports and fifty countries. It is a day when churches around the world hold services and collections to celebrate and recognise seafarers.


Based in Teesport near Hartlepool, Honorary chaplain Fr Edward Mathias-Jones and his team visit ships and provide onshore support to seafarers at the Flying Angel Club. As well as providing practical essentials such as phone top-up cards, warm clothes and somewhere to socialise, he says "The Club is also often the only safe place for seafarers to raise issues of exploitation or unsafe working conditions." 

Caroline Hodgson *reflects on* Colossians 1:1-14

There's a well-known verse nestling in the middle of this reading: "we have heard of your faith... and... love... *because of the hope laid up for you in heaven*". Those are my italics. The reason this verse stops me in my tracks is because I wonder what I – what we – think of heaven. (By "we" I don't just mean "we Christians" – this is a question for everyone.)

Cartoon heaven has a large ornate gate rising out of a cloud, with St Peter acting as a kind of bouncer, and cherubs, complete with halos and harps, lounging around on cushiony clouds. We may not take that literally, but do we have an alternative in our mind's eye? Do we need some idea of heaven for the health of our faith? Or is the very

notion damaging and distracting? Was John Lennon right? Is it healthy to think of "above us... only sky"?

This is one for personal reflection and prayer, so I can only provide my own insight, with the help of Charles Haddon Spurgeon. He preached about this in 1878: "It is clear that no man has a hope laid up in heaven unless he has hope within himself." I agree. It's not about keeping our fingers crossed, hoping that something may or may not be reality, for surely that's a distraction. It's about looking deeper within, drawing on our inner, God-given resources, to find the flame of hope within. Hope, like charity, begins within – heaven in the here and now. 


## Stained glass

*In a three-part series, Heather Smith writes about the history and significance of stained glass*

Plain coloured glass could be found in Christian basilicas in the third to fifth centuries and in England the abbey at Monkwearmouth had green, blue, amber and red glass in the seventh century. Pictorial windows came later. In the tenth century the windows of the church of St Remi at Reims depicted stories, but it was the arrival of the Gothic style that moved the art form towards

the representation of biblical characters and saints that we are now familiar with.

At first artists were not interested in creating realistic pictures, but in illustration and ideas. In the fifteenth century, influenced by developments elsewhere in art, the style moved from Gothic to Classical. New approaches and different styles during the Italian Renaissance effectively killed off the traditional art of stained glass, swiftly followed by the Reformation, when creating religious images in glass was prohibited.

Much early pictorial stained glass was destroyed in the reign of Henry VIII and little survives in England – York Minister and Canterbury Cathedral having notable exceptions. 

“Give me my scallop-shell of quiet, My staff of faith... And thus I'll take my pilgrimage.

Walter Raleigh (c. 1554-1618), poet, soldier, politician, courtier and explorer