

St Peter's, Ealing
Sunday 7th August 2022
Trinity 8 YrC

Faith is the assurance of things hoped for

There is a famous passage from St Paul's letter to the Corinthians, chapter 13, which is often read at weddings. In it Paul writes to the Corinthians about faith, hope and love. Throughout the passage it is love that seems to be the focus of Paul's discourse. Although it is love that is described – love is patient; love is kind etc – there is a framework, a structure to this which is often missed – faith. Sure in the passage Paul writes that without love faith is pointless; yet love without faith is directionless; their complementarity strengthens them, gives both direction and purpose – hence faith, hope, love abide.

Today's passages of scripture explore faith more fully. Abraham's faith in God fulfilling his promise of descendants even in his old age; the letter to the Hebrews declaring the assurance of things hoped for, the completion of God's desire in us for fulfilment and salvation; in Luke's gospel Jesus' call to his followers to be faithful in all they do expressing a new order that proclaims to the world their faith in God.

Faith is a difficult idea to grapple with, especially today when our lives are guided by what we can see and touch, what we can measure and formulate. If it can't be measured or proved it does not compute. In such a world view, that in many ways makes a lot of sense, faith seems non-sense. Unfortunately, such a view of life pushes out the unmeasurable, the unproveable and the uncertain, the seemingly incapable and the unevaluable – aspects of life that make existence more complete. Faith is one of those uncertainties.

We can state what we believe. We do each Sunday in the liturgy as we recite the Creed: we believe in one God; we believe in Jesus Christ; we believe in the Holy Spirit. When asked why? Why do you believe in these things? It is faith to which we turn as an explanation; it is not a proof.

Faith is not meant to be a proof. We state what we believe. We wrestle with what we are supposed to believe and may find difficult sometimes. But faith is

not meant to be proven. It's proof, if there is one is in us, the body of the believers. In how we live and move and have our being. The proof of faith is our words and actions. For if we have faith in Jesus Christ our lives, how we live our lives will be different from the way others who have no faith live theirs.

The way of Christ is not the way of humanity. We see this in our reading from Luke today. Jesus exhorts his followers to be ready – have your lamps lit – be ready for your master is coming; in being ready and faithful you will be rewarded. Jesus also encourages his followers to relinquish the values of the world – sell your possessions and give alms. This is definitely not the way of the world – moving our natural focus away from ourselves and our comfort and giving to those in need. In doing this the followers are not just doing as they are told, they are expressing their faith in Jesus.

Living in faith and following the way of Jesus is also to be fearless; “Do not be afraid” Jesus said. All we have to do is trust in God. So many people live in fear and there are many things in life to fear. By trusting in God, by living in faith these fears pale into insignificance, they lose their purpose and power as our perspective of life, as the centre of our world shifts from ourselves towards God.

Faith is also living dangerously for it is not an easy way of life. Many ridicule us and persecute us and call us idiots, all because they don't understand us or our faith, our relationship with God.

Yet faith is you and me gathering around this table to receive Jesus into our lives; to rededicate ourselves to him who gave himself for us. To receive him as our Lord and Saviour. By taking blessed bread into our hands, we receive him afresh who brings meaning and wholeness to our lives. All we need to do is come to God in faith with our hands opened wide to receive and as a caring master he will serve us in love.