



..... *Sunday after Pentecost*
Sermon by Revd Sharmain James



Sunday 7 August 2022

READINGS

Isaiah 1:1, 10-20; Psalm 50:1-8, 24; Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-19; Luke 12:32-40

Faith

In our reading from the letter to the Hebrews, we get the famous definition of "FAITH." Faith the author writes: - "IS the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. " "By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to set out..., not knowing where he was going."

And in today's gospel reading we hear Jesus telling us: - "Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." - "You also must be ready; for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour."

When we hear such thoughts from today's scripture readings, it calls forth from us a strong and deep faith. We can easily feel guilty because our faith is not like that.

- We may not feel much conviction of things not seen; in fact we may have many questions.
- We may not be able to heed the warning not to be afraid because we are full of fear.
- We may not feel very ready for the Son of Man's unexpected coming; we may even question whether he is coming at all.

In other words, we fear what might happen to us if we actually put our lives into God's hands. As a consequence, we take a half-hearted approach living our faith.

The author of the letter to the Hebrews recounts the lives of heroes or ancestors of faith as examples for us. The faith of Able, Enoch and Noah are the first examples in a section left out of our reading today. These heroes of faith - They all believed the unseen; they all trusted a promise and they all held on to things for which they had to wait and hope. Then he describes for us how Abraham, our father in faith, lived with the assurance of what is hoped for and the conviction of things not seen. Abraham was so sure in the Lord's promises, so convinced in the reality of who God is and therefore in the content of what God promised him at 75 years old, he packed up his entire livelihood and moved to a far away land that God had vowed to show him eventually.

God didn't reveal to him the destination - and he certainly didn't reveal to him that he would have to fight for the land as a senior citizen. Abraham, nevertheless, packed up all his belongings and went on the journey of faith trusting that God would lead him. leaving Ur was just the beginning with Abraham's journey of faith. God promised the childless, aged Abraham that he would make him through Sarah the

father of many nations, something that because of their ages was basically a biological impossibility. He brought Abraham outside and had him look into the heavens and said, "Look up at the sky and count the stars, if you can. Just so shall your descendants be."

God made Abraham wait 25 years for the fulfillment of that promise. It would have been very easy for Abraham to lose hope, to think that he was deceived. He was tempted once to name someone else his heir and Sarah lost hope and had him sleep with her maid so that he could become a father. But for the most part Abraham continued to have the assurance of what is hoped for, the conviction of things he couldn't see. And Isaac was born when he was 100 and Sarah 91. But as tough as that 25 year test was, it wasn't even the toughest one God had in mind for Abraham. 13 years later, God asked Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac, the son of the promise, the son through whom he would become the father of many nations. For most people that would have been the last straw. God was asking him to do something that at first sight seemed a contradiction of everything he had revealed up until that point. But Abraham loaded up his beloved son with the wood for the sacrifice and headed out to Mt. Moriah. And Abraham with faith was just about ready to carry out that sacrifice- when the angel of God stopped him. Abraham did all of this, believing, as the Letter to the Hebrews tells us today, that if God wanted him to sacrifice Isaac, it must be so that God could raise Isaac from the dead (v. 19). He believed in God's goodness and power so much that even if he were to kill his son, he knew that God would give him back.

The writer of Hebrews encourages disciples to respond to God's calling with faith like the faith of Sarah and Abraham, especially when they cannot see the rewards of the work. We depend a lot on what is seen in order to be able to prove things exist. I am reminded of a phrase when I did the Walk to Emmaus for women "Participate, don't anticipate!" As the retreatants - we wanted to know what was in store for us. The retreat team had promised us that we would have a special experience while on the retreat. Some of us wanted to know what was going to happen next. The team - had to reassure us that we were already a part of the process of what was going to happen and we should not anticipate what was going to happen, but just participate in what was happening right then.

In life, we believers are anxious about the promises GOD has made to us. We believe in what Jesus has told us about the Reign of GOD, but we want to know the details of what is going to happen next. We anticipate the future without participating in the present. We want the Master to return, but we don't want to have to prepare for His return by doing what is expected of us right now. We, like Abraham, are called to move forward, not knowing all the details of how GOD is going to work it out, but we are sure that GOD has a plan for us, a plan which we do not fully comprehend at this point in our lives. We live with the assurance that GOD is going to work it out as we participate in what GOD is asking us to do right here and right now. We live as members of the Reign of GOD which is "already but not yet." Likewise, according to Jesus parable of the diligent servants – faith is the attitude of active, engaged alertness. In other words, Faith in things unseen is active, not passive waiting. Jesus calls us to lives of faithfulness, being ever ready to participate in the reign of God.

Those prepared are willing to trust God's leading into the future, as were Sarah and Abraham. The prepared ones are those who strive to live faithfully. Faith is more than belief. Rather, faith is about trust and loyalty and where we dare to invest ourselves. To say we have faith in God is to do more than say it – to have faith means to live a radically different way, trusting that tomorrow is taken care of in the providence of God. Our act of faith is now – not later – not next week – or when it is convenient. We are to be like the servants who awaits their masters return – ready and prepared for the Lord. We are to find our faith, hope and trust in God.

AMEN