

“The seesaw of Faith: Certainty and Doubt”

The readings today offer a wide scope for interpretation but I think they help us consider what it means to have faith: in Genesis we read how God confirms Abram's faith by giving him a new name Abraham - Father of nations - and then in Mark's gospel we hear how Jesus perhaps rebuked Peter and the other disciples for their lack of faith and not trusting in God's plan.

But where do we stand I wonder? Are we like Abraham or more like the all too-human disciples? or perhaps is our faith more like a see-saw - sometimes up and very strong and then at others down and very low? Abraham at 99 had every reason to doubt God's promise that he and Sarah would indeed be the parents of many nations, but he did take God at his word and went forward in trust even if reason and logic told him otherwise. Surely there is message there for us today - God tells us to trust in him and that all things are possible through him even when we think it can't be so.... surely that is what faith is. Abraham was prepared to lay himself open to God even if what lay ahead seemed illogical.

Peter, however, at this point in the gospel story, lacked the faith of Abraham. His own natural, human desires take precedence and he will not accept Jesus's story of coming suffering and death: he saw Jesus simply as a King. He looked at the possibility of following a glorious Messiah but was not so keen on the concept of persecution. The lesson for us, as we all know, is that the Christian road is not one that is paved with wealth and ease: it is one that often means hard work, persecution, deprivation, suffering and lots of doubt. Peter at this point does not have the faith to believe that God could create good from, what was to him, undoubted evil. I sense that here Jesus is not simply addressing Peter but all the disciples who in a way were trying to stand between Jesus and the accomplishment of his mission. And here might well be a lesson for us today - not to try to protect Jesus but simply follow him: it is not what we want of Jesus but what Jesus wants of us.

We can only do our best by Jesus when we are prepared to move forward in faith. Certainly we will have doubt, but we need to trust like Abraham and move forward trusting in God's divine purpose for us.

We all tend to hold back from acting or even speaking because of our fears of what others might think but it is because we *are* Christians that we have to be ready to lose our reputations, our old ideas, our fears, our concerns and even our lives - be prepared to be laughed at, ridiculed, in order to push forward to achieve the goal that God has for us. Because in the end we stand to gain far more than we shall ever lose.

Jesus was always ready to turn things upside down and contradicted what society saw as 'normal' - first and last, saving and losing, rich and poor. It is in following his teaching rather than our own human emotions that faith can get a foothold.

Faith is the human response to divine truth and is not a natural act for any of us, faith is the result of God's action on our souls; faith demands an act of will, it is higher than the faculty of human reason and logic and that is what so often prevents us from having faith. Human logic and human reasons stop us from reading into areas of life where uncertainty and fear reignwe all prefer our comfort zones!

But Jesus had so much faith in God that he could walk the road to Calvary and die an agonising death despite the doubts that he had - and we know that to be the case, and it is good for us to know that. Part of growing in faith is to acknowledge that we have doubts but for Jesus like Abraham, his doubts were overcome by tremendous faith in God.

Are too logical? too earth-bound? too careful? Too comfortable? to allow faith to spur us on to greater things? I don't know that your answer will be but I know where I stand. I firmly believe that we shouldn't hold back, too concerned whether we are doing the right thing, when that inner voice - the voice of the Holy Spirit is telling us to get on with it!

That said we much acknowledge that faith often has a price to pay.....Jesus went to death because of his faith in God and that may well deter us from having faith but there is one important event that came after his death - resurrection ! We are Christ's resurrection people and there is nothing to fear.

I pray that God will give us the courage to speak, to think, and to act, knowing that Christ has trod the path before us and that he is with us every single step of the way.

Thanks be to God. Amen