

FAITH HOPE LOVE

Readings:

Genesis 12: 1-5

Genesis 15: 5,6

Matthew 17: 20



These three remain faith hope love and the greatest of these is love.

Our theme for the next three All Age communion services are faith, hope and love.

I wonder which Bible characters come to mind when we use the word **faith**?

What is faith? We talk a lot about faith don't we, but when it comes to defining what it actually is we go a bit quieter! The book of Hebrews tells us that "faith is confidence in what we hope for, and assurance about what we do not see."

A theologian called Moreland, says faith is: "a trust in, and commitment to, what we have reason to believe is true."

Faith isn't a trust in something or someone we know absolutely nothing about, because it is grounded in reasons to believe, backed up by the experiences described in the Bible, the life of the church, traditions that help us pray and commune with God and life experience.

Trust in God is based on revelation. God is revealed and speaks to people. God can be known by people. Noah hears God and said yes to God – and so does Abraham.

Abraham is mentioned a lot in the New Testament as an example of faith. Abraham lived in Ur, an important city in the ancient world; a thriving civilisation which traded extensively with its neighbours and also had a vast library! God wasn't happy with Ur; most of it's people had forgotten or ignored God – so God spoke into Abraham's life. *"I want you to leave Ur and everything you have there, and go and live in another country miles away which you don't know anything about. It's because I want to use you to start another nation –but don't forget – I'll look after you and bless you if you go – it will be worth it!"* Abraham amazingly took a huge leap of faith and said yes to God. (It is the second of 5 covenants recorded in the Bible- Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, Jesus).

It was long walk to Canaan, skirting the edge of 2 deserts. Abraham said yes to God, although God asked him to leave all that was familiar and learnt more about God on the way. His faith was tested to the extreme with promises from God that he did see fulfilled for years. Abraham built several altars along his journey, to honour God, to pray at and to keep in touch with God. And look what came out of his listening and going? A new nation in a new land, the beginning of Jesus' genealogy from apparently barren and elderly parents, and Jerusalem and the Temple.

So what about our faith? How easy do we find it to say yes to God? We have the advantage of the stories to encourage us and inspire us. More than Abraham had! We have the hindsight of his experiences to learn from. And we have the New Testament.

In John 8:58 Jesus is recorded in John's I AM sayings. 'Before Abraham was, I AM'. Scholars agree that this is no mere confusion of tenses. It is a proclamation by Jesus that he is indeed the great I AM, the one who was revealed to Moses as the God of Abraham and who is named 'I AM'. And this message disturbed those who heard it – it was blasphemous and they tried to stone Jesus for having said it (John 8:59).

And yet Jesus is the great I AM. This is the revelation at the root of our faith. The first reality, the foundation of the Cosmos, is 'I AM', not 'it is'. A relationship.

There is a Kylie Minogue song that lists a lot of things she doesn't believe in, followed by the words *I believe in you*. The amazing message of Christianity is that God believes in us. God is revealed to us. God says Yes to us. And so faith is about relationship. A relationship in which we can respond more and more with yes to God in our hearts, minds and lives.

A prayer from 1 Kings 18 ***Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac and of Israel, let it be known this day that you are God.. and that I am your servant...***

HYMN REFLECTION from Malcolm Sturgess

Today's hymn is based partly on the passage about Abraham in Genesis XV. The hymn as we know it clearly proclaims its pedigree, being the product of a first-class poet and a first-class composer. Its origins go back centuries, but it has only become a well-known favourite in the last half-century. It was originally written by Joachim Neander (Neumann) (1650 -1680), once he had been redeemed from his riotous youth by a pastor whose church service he had intended to disrupt. It went through three distinct stages before becoming part of our core repertoire. It was translated by Robert Bridges, the Poet Laureate, for inclusion in the wonderful Yattendon Hymnal of 1899 (of which I have a valuable copy given to me by Ronald Sibthorpe). The concentrated text (no waffle or clichés here) merits careful consideration, which, sadly, we don't have room for here.

There was a tune contemporary with with the original words, but in 1930 the Director of Music at Charterhouse School sent the text to Herbert Howells and asked him to write a setting, which he did immediately, while eating breakfast. For thirty years after that it was used in public schools, but then in 1968 it was included in 100 Hymns for Today's Church, and took off round the English-speaking world.

Herbert Howells (1892 - 1983) was a sensitive man who "experienced life through his senses, rather than abstract ideals" He had plenty of experiences to shape his life, including his father's bankruptcy, his son Michael's death at the age of nine, and two World Wars. (He also had the honour of teaching my sister at school in the 50's). He never really recovered from Michael's death, and named the tune after him, which added to its appeal.

All my hope on God is founded;
he doth still my trust renew.
Me through change and chance he
 guideth,
only good and only true.
God unknown, He alone,
Calls my heart to be his own.

Pride of man and earthly glory,
sword and crown betray his trust;
What with care and toil he buildeth,
tower and temple, fall to dust.
But God's power, hour by hour,
Is my temple and my tower.

God's great goodness aye endureth,
deep his wisdom, passing thought:
Splendour, light and life attend him,
beauty springeth out of naught.
Evermore, From his store,
New-born worlds rise and adore.

Daily doth th'Almighty Giver
bounteous gifts on us bestow;
His desire our soul delighteth,
pleasure leads us where we go.
Love doth stand At his hand;
Joy doth wait on his command.

Still from man to God eternal
sacrifice of praise be done,
High above all praises praising
for the gift of Christ his Son.
Christ doth call One and all:
Ye who follow shall not fall.