

Faith?

Pitt Street Uniting Church, 7 August 2016

A Contemporary Reflection by Ms Kathryn Lynch

Pentecost 12C

Hebrews: 1-11; Luke 12: 32-40; Contemporary reading:

***On the Edge from God and the Future* by Henry McKeating**

This reflection can be viewed on You Tube at <http://www.pittstreetuniting.org.au/> under "Sunday Reflections" tab

When I was younger Christian I would hear the stories of Bible heroes, and put myself in their shoes – wondering how I would react and respond to the challenges that they were facing. Would I be brave and follow a voice, a vision, an urging, leaving everything to search for God and follow his lead? Would I go, willingly, unhesitantly, enthusiastically, wholeheartedly, passionately? Or would I be like the Bible characters who get tut-tutted for pausing, worrying, frozen by fear into inaction, or asking too many questions. Would I be the one who didn't leave my home to follow God's call, or didn't sell all my possessions, or laughed at the sheer ridiculousness of what God was promising? Even worse, if I did follow God, how would I know that what I was hearing was real and not just some voice in my own head? Wouldn't being like Abraham be just craziness? How would I know if this was really God speaking to me?

Would I even hear God's voice, if he did speak to me?

"Just have faith" is something people have said to me over the years. Or sometimes even: *"Your belief is not strong enough."*

I have long envied those people who live lives of great faith, of quiet assurance, of rock-solid, just getting on with it, not making a fuss, kind of faith. Because, you see, I am a doubter, and a worrier, and a skeptic. I am sometimes depressed, and frequently anxious. What does this say about my faith?

Just have faith. Your belief is not strong enough.

Can you have faith, but also worry about what the future holds? Does that mean you really don't have faith? Or don't have enough faith?

To some extent, we all worry about something or other, some of the time, a little fear tucked in the back of our minds. But those who struggle with anxiety sometimes find that these fears have grown too big—the unanswerable fears and questions are let loose, gripping their hands around our necks in a way that paralyzes us with fear. Even questions about faith, about God, about suffering can plague our souls.

In the gospels, Jesus talks to his disciples about the things that they should stop worrying about. Don't worry about what you will eat, or what you will wear or where you will live. Don't worry about the future. Sell what you have! Give up your possessions! You need to have enough faith so that you cannot be caught unawares in a state of faith-less-ness when I return to you.

And then Hebrews reminds us about God telling Abraham that he should leave his homeland, with its security and family connections, and follow him. Be faithful! Have faith! Just listen to my voice and my instructions, and follow what I say. It will all be okay. I, God, will be faithful to you.

Personally, I think it's quite reasonable to worry about paying the rent, and having money for food and bills. Why wouldn't Jesus want security for his followers? Or is something else going on?

Is Jesus giving ethical counsel or eschatological warning? Was Jesus talking to his disciples about the here and now, or the arrival of the new age being imminent, or even about some far off future event when history would be wound up and everything set right with the Second Coming of Christ.

It seems to be a bit of both: it is a direct ethical instruction and a proverb: "*It is God's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.*" "*(Therefore) sell your possessions, and give alms.*" In other words, simplify your lives; lighten your burden of material assets so that your (spiritual) journey will no longer be impaired by their weight. And then another proverb type saying: "*Where your treasure is, there will your hearts be also.*" This exemplifies the prophetic spirit of justice with which that literature was imbued. Lighten your burdens. Give yourself less to worry about. Just listen to me. Ignore all those other voices.

Maybe we get faith confused with certainty. Scripture says that faith is the assurance of things hoped for. But it does not say that faith is a clear as day certainty. Maybe we get confused between our faith in the vision and our faith in the God who gives the vision. God offers us so many promises if we will respond in discipleship: salvation, resurrection, eternal life, fulfilment, wholeness, reconciliation, etc. But it is God that we need to grow to know, not the details of the promises. It says that Abraham and Sarah set out, not knowing exactly where they were going. They did not travel in the strength of a certainty about what the promised land was like. They travelled because they trusted God and they knew that God was faithful to take care of the details so long as they obeyed.

Some people speak of faith as a gift. And it is. But for me, much more than that, faith is an action. It is something I DO. It is especially something I do, even when I don't have enough belief that God's promises will come to pass, because, sometimes I find life hard and disappointing and heartbreaking. Faith is something that I do, even when the path seems a bit vague. I DO faith, I follow God. And I do this faith, with others – some who are doubters and worriers like me, and some who are strong and steadfast.

The Bible calls us, repeatedly, to pray together, to break bread together, to encourage one another daily, to serve one another in love. To do this time and again. This is faith.

One last word from another Bible hero. David is said to have written this Psalm:

*“When I said, ‘My foot is slipping,
your love, O LORD, supported me.
When my anxiety was great within me,
your consolation brought joy to my soul”*

(Psalm 94:18-19) ¹

David was not preaching a refrain of “*Have more faith.*” He was not, in fact, preaching a refrain of anything concerning what he could do himself. His anxieties at that time were great, and the Lord consoled him. David did nothing, and the Lord did everything, not only saving him but restoring his joy.

The Lord knows our questions. He knows our fears. He knows the panic that can grip us in the night as we stack up those unknowns on a shelf. He knows, and yet for this too, He died, that one glorious, victorious day, we might be set free.

Years of having faith, and anxieties, has helped me see grace in a new way. I am filled with wonder and thankfulness at a God who still hasn’t given up on me. Faith has helped me understand the weight of Jesus’ burden on the Cross—He who carried every sin and pain of the world, my worries and anxiety included. Let’s do faith together.

Thanks be to God.

¹ Extract from Rachael Dymski, July 22, 2014, Relevant Magazine.