

# *Faith*

*Ninth Sunday after Pentecost (OS 19C)*

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I am mindful of the story of a solo bush walker in the Southwest, whose journey took him through horizontal scrub and as is possible in that country, he fell through and he found himself dangling in mid-air - hanging on by his fingertips. "Help", he cried out - and to his surprise God answered. After explaining his predicament, God said to him, "Yes I will help you - Let go". The bush walker thought for a moment and said, "Is there anyone else out there?"

It was a small child who gave the definition of faith, as believing in something that you know is not true. Perhaps a more orthodox definition is that of the writer to the Hebrews - Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. Although we are all familiar with the saying - seeing is believing - faith has at its very core that inward conviction that denies what we see or are in fact conscious of. The eyes of faith perceive a different world to those of our senses.

Faith has in its actions contrary to the sense of the world because of the perception of something beyond what the world tells us.

Faith is indeed the currency of heaven. Jesus says to his disciples and followers - forget the things of this world - concentrate on building up assets in the next. Abraham believed and it was credited to him as righteousness. Abraham's faith was not based on the physical evidence, but upon the promises of God. Faith gave him a share of heaven, and such was his assurance that he acted in a way contrary to the world's view. Here is an old man with an old wife, by any standard, setting out with the promise of descendants if he makes this journey. And he went.

Indeed, this is the test of faith. How you will act, is a direct consequence of what you believe. Were you to tell me that you believed that the roof was unstable and likely to fall in, I would be more inclined to believe you believed it, if you were wearing a hard hat. So it is with faith. It is not enough for us to speak of believing to others, but our actions should demonstrate this to others. If nothing is impossible to God, why are we so often seeking to limit what he is doing? The rational mind cautions us to take care we don't look foolish and so we hold back instead of allowing God to bless us and liberating him into action.

It is a lack of faith that asks "What is our budget?" - what therefore can we do. Faith says, "What needs to be done?" - Let's get on with it. This does not mean a wholesale denial of rational processes here. Gold taps for the rectory or some other extravagance. For our faith must be exercised in a framework. It is the church's responsibility to build that framework. Abraham did not decide - today I am going to Canaan so God can bless me. It was God who was the initiator. God said go... and I will bless you. We cannot just decide that we want to do this or that - and expect God to bless our enterprise and us. No, our starting point is the listening process.

This is the first step of faith. The expectation that God will speak to us and is concerned with what we are doing! It is easy for us to think of ourselves as unimportant, especially

as one of the smallest parishes in the country - but this is the profound truth - God is interested and has a plan for us. He desires that we discern it and put it into practice.

So how is it that we listen? It is not that we will necessarily hear a voice from the sky although that still happens, but more so, it is as we ourselves become Christlike, that we begin to see the world through his eyes. The same things tug our hearts and we become outraged at the same injustices. It is not that you or I become Christ, but in the same way that couples become alike after years of marriage, so we become like Christ through journey with him. This comes from being with God's people, reading and studying his word and spending time in his presence - in worship and in prayer.

It may be becoming a bit of a cliché but the question "WWJD?", "What would Jesus do?" is most important.

So our faith journey begins by gathering as God's people and studying his word and spending time in prayer. As we come to an assurance together of the way forward, then faith will move us on.

I believe that in our hearts we already know what it is that God wants to happen. But it takes courage to allow our hearts to rule. It takes courage to step outside the bounds of rationality and to trust and believe. But this is the challenge of faith. Let us not limit ourselves to what it is that we think we can do, but rather, let us consider the possibilities that God offers and act in faith. Above all, let the world see our faith in action, that they too might dare to dream and respond. Perhaps it is an unlikely Christian symbol, but as we tell the world that the roof is falling, let us be seen in our hard hats.

**AMEN**