

## **The Revd David Theaker**

### **The Tenth Sunday after Trinity**

Isaiah 1.1,10-20

Hebrews 11.1-3, 8-16

Luke 12.32-40

'Why is faith so difficult?' someone asked Basil Hume. He replied, 'It is not faith that is difficult. Life is difficult, and faith is an attempt to come to terms with life.'

The whole of Chapter 11 of the Letter to the Hebrews, of which we heard some nine verses, celebrates those, named or nameless, who

trusted in God's promises  
held firm in times of difficulty  
under threat of persecution.

Those to whom the writer now refers are remembered for their FAITHFULNESS.

Abraham was promised something he could not see, something about which he could not know.

'he was called to set out...  
and he set out,  
not knowing where he was going'

St Paul, in Romans 4.20 writes of Abraham:

'No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, being fully convinced that God was able to DO what he had promised.

Therefore his faith

“was reckoned to him as righteousness.”

'He set out' Hebrews tells us, 'not knowing where he was going.'

'...he stayed for a time  
in the land he had been promised,  
as in a foreign land, living in tents.'

Not putting down roots 'for he looked forward'.

Although Abraham trusted in God's promises, he did not receive them. Nor did Isaac, nor did Jacob; but they did see them at a distance and recognise what they saw.

FAITH 'the assurance of things hoped for  
the conviction of things not seen' is REAL

The words, once again, strike the same chord as Romans (8.24)

'for in (or by) hope we were saved.  
Now hope that is seen is not hope  
for who hopes for what is seen?'

The things for which we hope, the faith in which we hope is

REAL

Our faith and our hope are not misplaced or misguided.

We've just kept the Feast of the Transfiguration. In Matthew's account, when it was all over, the light, the voice, Moses and Elijah – gone, the disciples lifted up their eyes

and saw only Jesus

Peter learned. The church knows

there is only Jesus

In Christ alone is salvation.

He is the pioneer, the perfecter, the only one on whom we should model our behaviour.

He is the One we should follow, our journey in faith and in life is to 'travel in' to Him.

This Jesus, St Luke tells us, said to his disciples: Fear not.

'Do not be afraid, little flock.'

He speaks, this Jesus, to his disciples – those whom he has chosen – that small band of people (cf Hosea) whose hearts God has touched.

Though few in number, they need not fear on that account. For they are the object of the Father's 'good pleasure'. He will give them 'the kingdom'.

Only in this verse, out of all the gospels, is the kingdom said to be 'given'.

Jesus trusts his disciples, and they will betray that trust, will let him down: when the end comes

there is only Jesus

He asks them to trust him, in simple trust, that his gracious words are true, his promises sure.

He will not let them down.

Then Luke recalls two parables, two words of Jesus. In both of them the same message is heard:

Keep awake! Be on the alert! Watch!  
Be ready

'open the door for him as soon as he comes and knocks'.

Those who look, who watch, who wait, will not be disappointed.

He will make them 'sit down to eat'.

The master will wait on the servants.

But trusted servants have extra responsibility,.

To whom much is given, from them much is expected.

The prophets, amongst whom Isaiah must be numbered one of the greatest, spoke, not their own words, but the words God put into their mouth.

'Thus says the LORD – the Holy One of Israel'

They saw, had insight, these seers. They proclaimed, they taught.

God commanded and, though sometimes reluctantly, they obeyed his command. They sought his will and did it.

Isaiah's words are forthright (verses 16-17):

'Cease to do evil,  
learn to do good.  
Seek justice, rescue the oppressed,  
defend the orphan, plead for the widow.'

Until this word is obeyed, there can be no worship worth the name.

The community to which Isaiah addresses himself is left in no doubt whatever where its failures may lead, or of the consequences of wrong behaviour.

‘Wash yourselves,  
make yourselves clean.’

The Parent, looking at his wayward children, yet loves them and yearns for them.

But these children, his people, ought to set an example, and are the more culpable when they fail to do so.

Trust God.

Believe in Him, hope in Him.

Like Abraham, look forward with God.

Hear His voice, obey His Word, and be thankful that He loves you beyond all deserving.

Listen to some words from Fr Herbert McCabe in *God, Christ and Us*:

‘There is no straight and settled road towards God. God in man may be anywhere at any time. He is like a thief at night-time. The coming of the Son of Man is like a lightning bolt;’ you never know when the revelation is to be offered to you. The preaching of the gospel does not explain God to you. It makes you ready, open, vulnerable to the sudden flashing out of divinity at the most unlikely moment – just at the moment when you are most irritable, most likely to reject the importunate boring grasping person who needs you.’