

Sermon for Holy Trinity Geneva on Sunday 10th August 2025 – the Eighth Sunday after Trinity

Texts: Genesis 15.1-6; Hebrews 11.1-3, 8-16; Luke 12.32-40

Living by faith

‘Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for; the conviction of things not seen’ (Hebrews 11.1). So the writer of the Book of Hebrews advises us. But what does it mean for us to live by faith in the context of our world today?

Does it mean living in optimism that things are going to be OK and God has everything under control, often despite all appearances to the contrary both in current world events and what may be going on in our own lives? Or is it resignation to what is happening – we feel helpless and are sure we cannot do anything so living by faith means simply putting up with what is happening because we can see no alternative? Or is it something else?

These is a vital question which affects each one of us. Some people have given up on their Christian faith because of what is happening in the world right now, and for others, their faith has come under severe pressure. These pressures have raised a further question whether living by faith involves us setting limits to that faith. In other words, do we trust God up to a certain point but then say, “Enough is enough – you haven’t sorted out the world’s problems or my problems by now so I’m off”? Or does ‘living by faith mean something else?

It is important as Christians that we grapple with these questions and don’t try to evade them because they fundamentally affect how we approach and live our lives. Remember living by faith in God is integral to the promises which our parents and godparents made on our behalf at our baptism – a promise which we have then made ourselves when we committed ourselves to Christ at our confirmation.

We can be tempted to evade the question by arguing that living by faith is much more difficult nowadays because of the complexities and ambiguities of modern life. We look back, often wistfully, to what we imagine was a golden age in which we imagine there was far greater certainty; in which choices for Christians were far more clear-cut; in which good was clearly good and bad was clearly bad.

But this is a myth. In every age, right from Abraham and Moses, throughout the history of the Israelites, the early church and for Christians in every century leading up to our own age, each generation has had to grapple both individually and as a church community what it really means for us to live our lives by faith. What we have to do is to tackle this question in the reality of our world and our own lives today.

So what does it mean to live by faith today?

First of all, it is about having faith in *someone*, not an abstract entity or concept. For us as Christians, living by faith means living by faith in God as the Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In the Bible we see how human beings have gradually learnt to

discern more about the nature of God as they encounter and build a relationship with Him.

Thus Abraham first learns to recognise God's call and follows Him, leaving his home in the land of Ur. Moses encounters God in the burning bush who reveals to him that he is being called to lead God's people out of slavery to the Promised Land. Over the following centuries of Jewish and then in early Christian history, people encountered God and came to experience Him within the context and changes of their time.

Then, living by faith is about having trust in God whom we know is faithful. This was something which Abraham and Sarah learnt gradually and painfully as they both physically journeyed to the land of Canaan and spiritually journeyed as a couple learning about the God who had called them. They faced enormous challenges of which the biggest was the living time-bomb they faced as they became older and older and still had no heir. Could they, in the face of all the odds, really trust the God who had called them to leave everything on what appeared to be on the surface, to be a wild goose trail? As we saw in our Genesis reading today, God promises to Abraham that he will have an heir and that his descendants will be more numerous than the stars. Abraham believes and puts his trust that God is faithful and will fulfil this and God recognises and affirms him in that faith.

Living by faith is also about trusting that God does have a plan both for us and for our world even though it may often be hard for us to glimpse it. It also may not happen in our lifetime. Abraham and Sarah had an heir, but God's promise that their descendants would inherit the land was fulfilled centuries later, after a long period of slavery in Egypt followed by the journey to the Promised Land.

At its core, living by faith is about trusting that God has revealed himself to us most fully and most vulnerably in Christ. This faith lies at the heart of the Book of the Hebrews in which Christ is described as the very imprint of God. He is the one who literally makes God visible to us in ways in which, as humans, with all our limitations and sinfulness, can understand. Christ reveals to us the nature of God, who is characterised by love, self-offering and redeeming; committed to justice, reconciliation and peace.

So we have seen what living by faith means in principle today. But how should we live this out in practice? How far is it about what we believe and how far is it about what we do? It's a thorny question with which Christians have grappled for centuries. In the Bible it is best expressed in what appears to be the tension between what St Paul and St James have to say on this.

St Paul has said that we are justified by faith; that is that we are saved by our belief in Jesus Christ. What matters is not the amount of our faith which may be as small as a mustard seed not the number of good works we carry out, but our belief and trust in Jesus as the Son of God. Whereas St James argues that faith without works is meaningless or even a travesty – faith must lead us to act upon our belief in Christ otherwise it is mere hypocrisy.

In practice, we need both faith and action as St Paul and St James reflected in their respective Christian ministries. Although living by faith in Christ lay at the heart of

Paul's ministry, he sought to make that faith a living reality to the Christian communities to whom he ministered as well as those who had not yet come to faith in Christ. For St James, his faith in Christ as the supreme revelation of God's love, compelled him to try to live this out in his own life as well as in the Christian communities to which he was addressing.

So, living by faith as Christians in the world today involves us too trying to keep the balance of faith in Christ and seeking to live it out as far as we possibly can. We are God's hands and feet on earth at this time, called to witness to God's love as revealed in Christ and to show in every way we can, what Christ's love might look like in practice in the world.

But this must be tempered all the time, by accepting that this is God's world, we are His creation and that ultimately all rests in God's hands. It is also about recognising the nature of our world and our own nature as human beings as made by God and what this involves.

For at the heart of the question of why there is such suffering in the world and why God appears to "allow" it to happen, lies the issue of human freedom. In theory, it would be possible for God to wave a magic wand, and all the problems of the world would disappear. It would be possible for God to stop the terrible conflicts we impose on each other so that they simply couldn't happen and we would live in peace and harmony.

Except that if this happened, it would be at the price of our freedom and at the price of what makes our world and indeed our universe, so amazing and so filled with potential. Integral to what it means to be fully human, created by God and in His image, is the freedom He gives us to make choices, to experience the consequences, to learn, to repent and to grow.

So it is in this context, in all its costliness and potential, in which God is calling us through Christ, to live by faith today. Not keeping our faith in God as a theory which we recite on Sundays, nor in acts of mindless activism so that we are seen to "do" something. Instead, God is calling us to tread the costly path mirrored to us by Jesus, of living each day by putting our trust in Him and seeking day-by-day, to discern how we can make God's love visible on earth, How we can show, often in the face of difficulty and opposition, that there is another way based not on seeking to get our own way, but finding a mutual way which brings justice and well-being to all.

It will also involve us in taking risks, as Jesus showed his disciples. Being a Christian and living our Christian faith out in practice means that we cannot 'mothproof' ourselves against difficulties and bad things happening. Remember Jesus' parable of the barns which we heard last week. But Jesus also shows us the flip side of this, that living by faith, if we really learn to trust God, leads us to stop worrying all the time about what might happen to us, and instead, commit ourselves and commit our beautiful world day-by-day to God. Whatever happens, we can always pray, and our prayers if we offer them in trust and faith, may have more impact than we can possibly imagine.

Finally, living by faith means learning to focus away from us and onto God. Today we've heard that God, as he reveals his promise to Abraham, leads him out of his tent. He leads him from the tent of his fears and doubts, to stand outside and in the darkness of the desert, to look up to see the glory of the star-filled night. God promises him that his descendants will be more than the stars of the sky. This week, we too have wonderfully clear night skies. So go out one night, find a dark spot, look upwards and let your eyes adjust. As you begin to glimpse the stars and pinpricks of millions of stars behind them, remember, like Abraham, the faithfulness of God and cast away your fear.

Amen

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