

Gen 15:1-6; Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16; Luke 12:32-40

Today's readings are all about **FAITH**. Hebrews even includes a definition of what faith is: *'Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen'* (11:1)

Faith is illustrated throughout Hebrews chapter 11 by the lives of men and women who have trusted and followed God. One is **Abraham**, who also features in today's Old Testament reading. God had chosen Abraham and made promises to him of many descendants and a land to live in, but there was no sign of either so far.

God says, *'Do not be afraid'* (Genesis 15:1b) Abraham had a constant struggle between fear and faith... and maybe we do too...

God had made clear promises to Abraham, but there was no sign of their fulfilment.. and we may feel like that too at times ..

Abraham thought of fulfilling the promises by his own efforts, by making his servant to be his heir. *'But the word of the Lord came to him, 'This man shall not be your heir; no one but your very own issue shall be your heir.'* (v4) God re-iterates his promise of a son and descendants, but with no explanation of how this might take place!..

'God brought him outside and said, 'Look towards heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them.' Then he said to him, 'So shall your descendants be.' (v5)

God gives Abraham a sign, something to remind him of the promises, to help him believe.

We have the **sign of the cross**, that we look to for re-assurance...

'And he believed the Lord; and the Lord reckoned it to him as righteousness.' (v6)

Abraham put his faith in God. This is a famous phrase, picked up by St Paul, and by Martin Luther at the Reformation (*'justification by faith alone'*) who both took it as the heart of their understanding of salvation, that we are seen as righteous by God, not by any works we do, but by our **faith** in Jesus Christ. So, Abraham is seen as a great man of God, and example of a person of faith.

So, in Hebrews 11 we read *'By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to set out for a place that he was to receive as an inheritance'* (v8a), *'By faith he stayed for a time in the land he had been promised, as in a foreign land.'* (v9a) **By faith** he received power of procreation, even though he was too old.' (v11a) Abraham learnt to live **'by faith'**.

We often refer to Faith as **Belief**, accepting certain things as true about God, and what he has done in the world (eg The Creeds). In Romans 10:9 Paul writes of, *'the word of faith we proclaim; if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved'*. Faith and Belief, if acted on, lead to salvation.

Faith is also often expressed as **Trust**, ranging from love to loyalty. As in our Text for 2019 *'Trust in the Lord with all your heart.'* (Proverbs 3:5)

Faith is also closely linked to **Hope**, as in the definition in Hebrews...

In today's Gospel reading, Jesus comes to this understanding from a different angle.

Jesus has been teaching about trusting God to provide for our needs, and so being able to be generous to others, and concludes: *'For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also'*. (Luke 12:34) Faith is a matter of where our **heart** is, the centre of our affection and also the centre of our thoughts and our hopes. Do we look to God to meet our daily needs? Do we trust in God's promises or simply trust in ourselves?

'Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen'.

To have faith in God is to look beyond our own resources, to look beyond this world, to God and the reality of eternity.

Faith looks at creation and praises the creator, faith looks at death and sees the promise of new life beyond, faith seeks to trust God for all that life asks of us, and on that trust builds a life which honours and pleases God. Let us seek to live as people of faith.