

# [1] Walking By Faith

Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> October 2018

Readings: Psalm 62, Psalm 115, Hebrews 11:1-12, Romans 10:9-15

St. John's Presbyterian, Mt. Roskill

Rev. Dr. Colin S. Marshall

Every one of us lives by faith. Every rational person alive lives by faith. For some that faith is misplaced. [2] When we get up in the morning and get in the shower we have faith the water will be hot. Occasionally that faith is put to the test. We get in the car and have faith that when we turn the key the car will start. The better the condition of the car and the better we look after it the greater confidence and faith we have it will work. When we get sick and go to the doctor we have faith the doctor will be able to work out what is going on and put us on the track to recovery. We have faith that our partner in life is faithful to us and that we can trust them with everything. Those who put their faith in science alone believe that rationally everything can and will one day be explained. Those who believe in different faiths believe their god or gods can save them and make their lives better. But when is faith misplaced?

Faith does not exist in a vacuum. Faith has an object, that is, something concrete on which it is based. That is why science and the Christian faith should not be at odds with each other. Science describes the natural world and is limited to that. It describes and demonstrates the repeatable and observable. The Christian faith not only recognises those concrete realities of the natural order but speaks to prime cause, purpose and meaning, it goes beyond what science, of its very nature, is able to do. As the brilliant scientist Carl Sagan observed, [3] *"Science is not only compatible with spirituality; it is a profound source of spirituality."* The Christian faith is predicated on the reality of the one and only God who not only creates but involves Himself in the Creation. God has put numerous pointers in Creation to Himself and, incidentally, instructed humanity to care for that Creation. He has also actively involved Himself in His Creation. As we have seen previously through multiple detailed prophecies given well before hand, then fulfilled, in the person of Jesus Christ amongst us, God has revealed the absolute nature of His Being.

In contrast the humanist, in all their socio-political forms, places their faith in humanities own ability to save itself. [4] The followers of the various religions place their faith in religious icons of their own making, in idols of their own creation. In Psalm 115 God scoffs at the foolishness of people who do this. When one's faith is placed in something of one's own creation it must, by definition, be far too small, far too limited. Psalm 115:4-8 points out the obvious, **"But their idols are silver and gold, made by human hands. They have mouths, but cannot speak, eyes, but cannot see. They have ears, but cannot hear, noses, but cannot smell. They have hands, but cannot feel, feet, but cannot walk, nor can they utter a sound with their throats. Those who make them will be like them, and so will all who trust in them."** As Abraham reputedly asked his father Terah why people bothered to follow deaf, dumb, inanimate objects we can only wonder why people continue to do so today. Faith can be misplaced. The Animal Farm realities of most political systems and socio-logical experiments reveal the same frailties and corruptions of human nature. It is all too easy in this world to have a misplaced faith.

What does faith mean for us then? It means trusting in God, believing in the hope that He provides, above and beyond ourselves. To step out in faith is then to literally act believing in what God can do even when it seems unlikely or even impossible. I love the account of one of the early missionaries to China that I read recently. [5] Hudson Taylor was a wonderful man of God who had great faith. Let me read you this account: *“When Hudson Taylor first went to China, he was on a sailing vessel, and their vessel had come very close to the shore of cannibal islands because the ship was caught in a calm, and it was slowly drifting toward the shore ... the savages were eagerly anticipating a feast. The captain came to Mr. Taylor and sought him to pray for the help of God. ‘I will,’ said Taylor, ‘provided you set your sails to catch the breeze.’ The Captain declined to make himself a laughing stock by unfurling the sails in a dead calm. Taylor said, ‘I will not undertake to pray for the vessel unless you will prepare the sails.’ And so it was done. While [Hudson] was in prayer, there was a knock at the door of his stateroom. “Who is there? Taylor asked” and the captain replied, ‘Are you still praying for wind?’ ‘Yes.’ ‘Well,’ said the captain ‘you better stop praying for we have more wind than we can manage.’”* Hudson Taylor had faith that God would do what was yet unseen so that His mission would be carried out. Hudson had the sailors, who didn't have his faith, act in faith by putting up the sails. Until they would act nothing would happen. When they did the hand of God was moved. Worth thinking about. What are you doing that moves the hand of God? Faith requires a conviction of things not yet seen, that God will do what He has promised as we walk in faith.

The faithful Christians described in Hebrews 11 had this conviction. It is conviction not always filled in the immediate ... something our Westernised culture struggles with. Last week I was watching a late-night documentary on the differences between the Western World and China. [6] While the West makes four or five year plans, usually associated with political terms and the like, the Chinese government makes plans to be achieved over two hundred years. I was also taken by a documentary I saw on some of the carved seats in European churches made of a very special wood that was prepared and treated for one hundred years before it could be used. The churchmen who began a batch of wood for treatment would never see the chairs and tables, the altars, made from the wood they were preparing. They had faith in how it would one day be used. That's not to say that we don't do something of the same. We exercise faith in the way that we educate our children, at home and at school. We believe that if we give our children the very best education, in faith and the tools of the world, then they will have every possibility of growing in faith and in the workplace to be Jesus loving, honest, trustworthy contributors to society. But spiritually I believe we need to be bolder. We need to step out in faith and trust God more. As the world is becoming more anti-Christian in so many of its practices and policies we are called to be ever bolder in proclaiming Jesus and pointing the world to how Jesus said things should be. Not by pointing out the world's faults but by two methods: [7] firstly, by being living models ourselves of what the world would be like if everyone followed Jesus. How we love and care for each other, how we serve the Lord in His community, how we care for the things of the Lord, how we speak and act on a day to day basis

demonstrate the reality of our faith in the Lord honouring His promises to us. Secondly, we demonstrate faith but our boldness and resilience. For the last sixty or more years Christian faith has been a given in New Zealand. It no longer is. Jesus has always called us to be a light on a hill and to not hide our faith under a bushel, under a pot. Furthermore, **for God has not given us a spirit of fear but of power, of love and of a sound mind** (2 Timothy 1:7). It is a lie of the devil that faith is simply a personal thing. The Christian faith never has been. Christian faith has been based on public profession from day one. Public baptism starts the Christian life with a very visual public testimony of a faith act in obedience to Jesus command. In [8] Romans 10:9-10 we are told that, **“If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.”** Our faith leads us to a natural concern for those who do not know the Lord and their ultimate destiny. But as [9] Romans 10:14-15 continues, **“How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”** God uses us to speak into others’ lives and we exercise faith when we do this expecting that God will, in time, bring about change in their lives. Mindful of course that it is according to His will and His timeframe. There are people I have prayed for, for over a decade, before they came to faith. God can do what seems impossible in the eyes of the world. When we walk in tune with His Spirit the most amazing things can happen. And we never, ever, give up.

Our faith is solidly placed in Jesus. [10] He is the object of our faith. He is the absolute reality of God that has come into our world, fulfilled the prophecies of old and will fulfil the promises of the future. He is the only one in this world we can trust and rely on.

Let me leave you with a final story. I had a visitor here at St John’s that came several times. He kept telling me about a prophet in Europe, alive now, who is going to change the world. Over several visits I listened and heard him out. Finally I asked him what prophecies had been made about this prophet and what had he done. He answered, “none but he will do great things”. I then opened the Scriptures and went through them showing the prophecies about Jesus and how Jesus had fulfilled them. I then pointed out some of the prophecies of what was to come. I asked him which was more reliable: the prophecies of Jesus and how He had fulfilled them and the hope, the conviction I had for what was prophesied in Scripture to come or a hope in the messiah he spoke of in Europe. The man was quiet for quite some time and then said: “I see your point.” He let me pray for him and off he went. I haven’t seen him since. I hope and pray he has come to know the Lord. Irrespective it makes a critical point. God has been and is working in the world to fulfil His purpose. We can have absolute confidence in that.

God calls each one of us to walk in faith each and every day. To know and trust in His Word. To have a sense of excitement about what He is doing and to know that no matter how hard the struggle, how difficult the challenge, He will bring about a wonderful outcome and all our efforts, our struggles, our challenges will be ultimately worth it as He rewards our faith. So, walk the talk, walk the faith, accept the challenges as part of the journey and rejoice that your Heavenly Father sees your faith, rejoices in it and will one day reward you for what you are doing!

Amen