

Pentecost 12 – 9am St Aidan’ & 10.30am Wesley – 7th August 2016

Theme: “Faith Journeying”

Reading: Hebrews 11:1-3 & 8-16

Text: “Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for.”

Hebrews 11:1-2

Introduction

For the next few Sundays the epistle reading is from Hebrews. Today’s reading is one of the most well-loved in the entire epistle and is part of the roll call of the exemplars from of old who lived out their faith. The section we have today focusses mainly on Abraham and Sarah and opens with the text I have used for my main verse, “Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.” Here the writer stresses the unseen quality of faith. By faith we venture forth into a future we don’t yet see. We venture with confident expectancy, certain of God’s continuing care of us, even as Abraham and Sarah ventured forth. Part of the adventure of any good journey is that we have no way of knowing just how the journey will end. So it is with the journey with and to God, known as faith. Let me repeat these sentences because this is at the crux of the passage today and is also implicit in the Gospel reading from Luke 12: 32-40. Part of the adventure of any good journey is that we have no way of knowing just how the journey will end. So it is with the journey with and to God, known as faith.

Looking at the passage – Hebrews 11:1-3 & 8-16

As we look at the Hebrew Scriptures, almost from the beginning the people of God were journeying people. The story of God’s people, Israel, begins with the journey of an old couple, Abraham and Sarah. Abraham ventures forth, as today’s lesson from Hebrews puts it in the Contemporary English Version, “without knowing where he was going” vs 8. They venture forth not only geographically to a different location on the map, but also spiritually, to a different location in their world. Abraham had been promised by God that he would be the father of a great nation, even though Sarah ‘was barren and past the age for having children’. Also of Abraham it is sensitively put that ‘he was as good as dead’ yet from he and Sarah came descendants as ‘numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore.’

Vss11/12

By the power of God, Abraham and Sarah were given a child, a future they didn’t know they would have, and so the family of Israel was born.

Their journeying led their descendants into slavery in Egypt but then later to further journeying as Moses led the Israelites out of slavery on a fresh journey which became known as the Exodus, towards the promised land.

The third great journey of the Hebrew Scriptures is the journey out of exile. The Assyrians and Babylonians had made war on Israel. Jerusalem was conquered, destroyed and many were enslaved. However eventually the remnant was allowed to return to Jerusalem and a rebuilding of the city and the temple took place. This was both a faith and a physical journeying for the people of God. The God of Israel beckons, calls forth, evokes and pushes us out on journeys. That’s why we shouldn’t

be surprised to find that the Gospels, including the gospel of Luke that we've been centring on this year, presents Jesus as being on a perpetual road trip. Likewise Jesus' followers are presented in just that way also. Followers of Jesus don't just sit at the feet of Jesus taking accurate lecture notes; they move with Jesus, attempt to keep up with him as he goes from place to place.

Even for us our journeying with Jesus is not a static experience but rather the image of faith is an image of journeying with Christ, unsure where that will lead and what may be required of us.

When the writer to the Hebrews speaks of 'faith' the writer doesn't list a set of beliefs that Christians must affirm. Hebrews doesn't list a set of events that we must believe to be historical facts. Rather the writer speaks of faith in action, faith as a journey in which people, having been met by God, venture forth with God. We are thereby invited to think about faith not as a set of propositions to be affirmed, not of a list of questions and answers in a catechism, but rather as a journey. Faith is journeying forth with God, just like Abraham and Sarah did.

This suddenly changes our experience of faith as something living, dynamic, ongoing and to some extent unknown and hence challenging. Where is the end of the journey and what will it be like? We really do not know but simply have to put our trust in God as the ancients did in the past. Then we need to journey with God – this can be a very unsettling experience.

Think of your own faith journeying for a moment. What has brought you to this place and time this morning? How have you journeyed in faith to the point where you are today? Our faith journeying is usually not simple, not straightforward – it takes us to many places and with many challenges. Some of that journeying may be physically taking us to different places and some may well be the spiritual journeying, the ups and downs that we inwardly struggle with.

Story of Marcus Borg's journeying

Biblical scholar and popular writer, the late Marcus Borg concludes his most famous book, "Meeting Jesus Again for the first time" with these words about his new found faith:

"Until my late thirties, I saw the Christian life as being primarily about believing. Like many of us, as a child I had no problem with belief. But at the end of childhood there began a period, lasting over twenty years in which, like many, I struggled with doubt and disbelief. All through this period I continued to think that believing was what the Christian life was all about. Yet no matter how hard I tried, I was unable to 'do' that, and I wondered how others could.

Now I no longer see the Christian life as being primarily about believing. The experiences of my mid-thirties led me to realize that God is and the central issue of the Christian life is not believing in God or believing the Bible or believing in any particular Christian tradition. Rather, the Christian life is about entering into a relationship with that to which the Christian tradition points, which may be spoken of as God, the risen, living Christ, or the Holy Spirit at work. And a Christian is one who lives out his or her relationship to God....

I sometimes joke that if I were ever to write my spiritual autobiography, I would call it.... "Beyond Belief to Relationship." That has been my experience. My own journey

has led beyond belief (and beyond doubt and disbelief) to an understanding of the Christian life as a relationship to the Spirit of God – a relationship that involves one in a journey of transformation.”

Conclusion

Faith is not a static concept, but a living relationship journeying through life with God revealed in Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit. In faith journeying God may well take you to places and people that unsettle your equilibrium, challenge your thinking, and move you well beyond the comfort zones you have made for yourself. Some are physical and some are spiritual and the two usually go ‘hand-in-hand’. My path, my journeying in ministry has been a strange mixture of delight, hard work, and surprises when I think life is simply going along quietly, then from ‘left field’ comes another change in direction in the faith journeying. Certainly my faith journeying has taken me around the country, living in four states and a territory, serving overseas on a number of occasions with Navy deployments as well as moving between parish/congregation appointments along with Assembly appointments both with Frontier Services and the military. Hence the faith journeying continues!

Let us pray:

Gracious God, we may have come here today to settle all the questions we have about life, to fix our faith, to be settled and certain about deep and complex matters. But that’s not the way it usually goes between you and us. We want things to be fixed, settled and certain; you keep prodding us, moving us, beckoning us forward in faith. Sometimes it’s tough for us to keep up with you. We follow breathlessly behind or unwilling to shift our thinking. We would like for things to stay the same, and all be calm in our faith journeying so we feel the calm and reliability of your presence in the way we think it out to happen!

Renew O God, our sense of the adventure of being loved by you. Rekindle our enthusiasm for following in your footsteps. Grant us courage to dare to walk where you lead. Give us faith to follow. Amen.