

Collect, Readings and Sermon for Sunday 20th February 2022
The Second Sunday before Lent

Collect

Almighty God,
give us reverence for all creation
and respect for every person,
that we may mirror your likeness
in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Genesis 2:4b-9, 15-end

In the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens, when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up—for the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no one to till the ground; but a stream would rise from the earth, and water the whole face of the ground— then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being. And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed. Out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, ‘You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die.’ Then the Lord God said, ‘It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner.’ So out of the ground the Lord God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every animal of the field; but for the man there was not found a helper as his partner. So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said,

‘This at last is bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
this one shall be called Woman,
for out of Man this one was taken.’

Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed.

Luke 8:22-25

One day he got into a boat with his disciples, and he said to them, 'Let us go across to the other side of the lake.' So they put out, and while they were sailing he fell asleep. A gale swept down on the lake, and the boat was filling with water, and they were in danger. They went to him and woke him up, shouting, 'Master, Master, we are perishing!' And he woke up and rebuked the wind and the raging waves; they ceased, and there was a calm. He said to them, 'Where is your faith?' They were afraid and amazed, and said to one another, 'Who then is this, that he commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him?'

Sermon by John Richardson

When I hear that Gospel story I wonder what would have happened if the disciples had not woken Jesus. Would Jesus have known there was a problem even though he was asleep? And what is this faith that would have saved them if they'd had enough of it without waking him?

We talk a lot about our Christian faith. There are thousands of books written about it. We discuss it ad infinitum. But what is it? Is it the sort of thing that will help us if we step out into the road when a car is approaching in the belief that the driver will see us and stop?

Each week when we come to church we recite together the creed - a set of propositions about what we believe as Christians. Is that what we mean by faith? In today's Gospel miracle the disciples wake Jesus because they are terrified. It would seem that faith is just what we need when things go wrong.

A good place to begin to answer our question is that wonderful passage in 1 Corinthians where Paul talks about love. He links love with two other things: "And now faith, hope and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love." So faith is linked with two other things: hope and love.

This is what Paul says at the beginning of this passage: "If I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing."

So it is love which drives our faith. The two things go together and we cannot have one without the other. We can have as much faith as we like, but without love it doesn't amount to very much.

Think for a moment about those you love. And think about the faith you have in them. And then think that to love someone is surely an act of faith. The love we have for each other is not something we can prove. We can show it: we can demonstrate it. But we cannot prove it. Love is an act of faith.

For the past four weeks Theresa has been leading us through a series of discussions entitled "Living in Love and Faith." There are those two words together again.

The course is all about relationships and how we live together and about how we as Christians relate to others. Relationships are important to us. Without them we don't amount to very much. We are social animals and depend on each other to give meaning to our lives.

Yet relationships can go wrong and often do. Differences and misunderstandings arise which threaten our relationships - sometimes to the extent that they break down altogether. It is when we begin to examine our relationships that we realise how important love is. Even though the relationship may be in jeopardy and there seems no possibility of reconciliation, the love is likely still to be there.

And this is where faith comes in. This is where we begin to see that it is faith in the other person that will help us through. This is where we realise that faith and love are inseparable and that we cannot have one without the other. So it's no coincidence that the title of the course is "Living in Love and Faith."

So what is this faith? If my car breaks down, faith won't put it right. What I have to do is have faith in the person who can put it right for me.

And this gives us a clue. We must have faith in other people. As Christians, we must have faith in God and in Jesus. But what does that mean?

In the Gospel, Jesus rebukes the disciples for their lack of faith. Surely they knew by now that he was someone for whom God was clearly present in his life? They must surely see that in Jesus God was present, unlike anything they had ever seen before. He rebukes them because they seem unable to see this.

Why could they not see that within this man from Nazareth the Kingdom of God was present? The disciples faced danger: even the danger of death. Life is full of storms of one sort or another. Not all of them life threatening, but fearful enough to present us with the possibility of loss or pain or hardship. We are not promised exemption because we are believers. Quite the opposite. Jesus often predicted that the disciples could expect trouble and hardship and persecution.

If faith is to come to our aid, it is because love is central to that faith.

The one thing that comes across in the teaching of Jesus is that the Kingdom of God is within us. Not only is it within Jesus: it is within us as well. That means that we are empowered by the one thing we can say about God - and that is that he is love. So. love and faith go together. You cannot separate them.

In his book, "Being Disciples", Rowan Williams talks about those three things Paul talks about in 1 Corinthians: faith, hope and love - what Williams calls the three indispensable qualities in the life of the Christian disciple. "To grow as a disciple is to take the journey from understanding into faith, from memory to hope and from will into love."

Faith for Williams is a "dependable relationship." We need, he says, to point quite simply to the God who does not let us go, to the Christ who does not run away.

Which means that we too must be dependable people - people in dependable relationships: people who are there for those who feel abandoned and lost: people who are prepared to stand up for what they believe in: to help and care for those who are downtrodden because of their beliefs and way of life. By being faithful to them, we show them what it is to have faith in the one who doesn't let us go.

As Williams put it: "You realise that when the signposts and the landmarks have been taken away, there is a presence that does not let you go. And that is faith."

Amen.