

Hebrews 11: 1-12, John 20: 24-29

Today in our series of small words with big meanings, we are thinking about faith.

What is faith? Why do we have it? How do people live a life of faith? How do we show our faith?

These are all questions which I asked myself as I was preparing to share with you today.

We are all humans. Yet, as fascinating as we are, we still have limitations.

Just think about our senses:

We can only taste that which is placed within our mouths.

We can only feel that which comes in contact with us.

We can only smell that which is nearby.

Our hearing might enable us to hear thunder miles away, but our hearing still has limits.

Our sight might be able to see the moon and the stars millions of miles away, but our eyes cannot see the microscopic germs that are almost everywhere.

As brilliant as we might feel about our thinking and reasoning, we are still limited in the amount of information we can retain.

Yet, in His wisdom, God did not leave us powerless with an overwhelming number of limitations. No, he provided us with a remedy for these limitations that we have. He provided **faith** to help bridge the gap ...

between limitations and potential,
between the visible and invisible world,
between the known and the unknown.

But what is faith? We hear this word a lot.

The first verse from our reading from Hebrews 11 can help us to define what faith is.

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

Faith is completely trusting the unseen God. It is the assurance and the proof of things we hope for even though we cannot see them. Faith knows He loves us completely. Faith knows that the death and resurrection of Jesus paid the penalty for our sins. Faith believes the Word of God is all we need to know to live a holy life.

Hebrews chapter 11 offers us many examples of those who showed faith. Faith allowed Abel to please God and Enoch to be taken up to heaven. Faith led Noah to build the ark and thus to be judged as righteous. Faith led Abraham to go to a land he had never seen and Sarah to have a child even though she was past the age for childbearing. These people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance.

Today is the feast of Pentecost. Jesus had promised his followers that, although they would not see him after his Ascension, they would receive the Holy Spirit to guide and inspire them. The disciples too had faith and trusted Jesus as they waited for the promise of the Holy Spirit to come upon them.

Pentecost was one example of when humans showed great faith, yet there are many other examples in the world today.

This weekend, we have heard that Queen Elizabeth has a strong Christian faith that has been evident throughout her life in her words and actions. In her first Christmas broadcast in 1952, she asks for the nation to pray for her: 'Pray for me ... that God may give me wisdom and strength to carry out the solemn promises I shall be making, and that I may faithfully serve Him and you, all the days of my life.'

Throughout her life, Jesus' example and teaching have been acted out in her dutiful and faithful life. It seems that her prayer from her first Christmas broadcast has been answered.

Many celebrities speak about how their Christian faith shapes their lives. Footballer Marcus Rashford, for example, is a 24-year old young man who has used his fame and wealth to campaign for child poverty for the past few years. In 2020, an estimated 4-million children were cut off from free school meals during the lockdown, and Rashford felt prompted by God to do something about this. He says that his actions spring up from his faith in God.

But it's not just famous people whose faith shapes their approach in life. I read stories on the Everyday Faith page of the Church of England website. A paramedic called Simon, who prays before entering the ambulance station to start his next shift. He prays and asks God to help him through the day. He says that he immediately feels God's peace which gives him joy to then serve God's people.

And finally, another story is about Miranda, a fitness instructor who leads sessions in her church hall. Because of her faith, she is thankful to God for her health so that she can offer her gifts to keep others healthy, both mentally and physically. She likes to be busy and active but also appreciates the times when she is still, as this helps her remember why she's doing what she is doing and who she is in God.

I think it's wonderful for us all to speak with others about our faith. To share about our faith journey and how our Christian faith sustains us in life and gives us hope for the future.

Earlier, we heard a passage from John chapter 20, which recounts the events of Jesus appearing to Thomas after his resurrection. A week earlier, Jesus had appeared to some of the other disciples, but Thomas was not there. As a result, Thomas had refused to believe in the resurrection until the moment, as we read today, that he encountered Jesus for himself. It took Thomas to see and touch the marks left on Jesus' hands and side for him to move from unbelief to total belief that Jesus had, in fact, been resurrected and was standing there right in front of him. In that moment, we read that Thomas says to Jesus, 'My Lord and my God.' This response is a beautiful confession of faith from Thomas!

Upon hearing his believing words, Jesus replies to Thomas: 'Because you have seen me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and (yet) have believed.'

Sometimes we might find it difficult to show our faith and believe things we haven't seen for ourselves? Here, the gospel writer St John indicates that those disciples who didn't see the resurrected Jesus and those first-century

Christians are called *blessed* because they have chosen to believe in the risen Jesus without seeing the proof for themselves. They showed faith that Jesus is who he said he was.

Have I seen Jesus face to face as Thomas did? No, I haven't, but I still believe in God and put my faith in him – having confidence and totally trusting in Him. I may not have seen Jesus face to face as Thomas did, yet what I have seen is God's love for me in his wonderful creation of the world. I've seen how my life (and others) have been transformed by having faith. Faith that sustains me and gives me hope for the future. I've received the gift of the Holy Spirit and daily feel it empower me and enable me to do God's work and to live my life pleasing God, worthy of my calling. And by faith, I know that I will see Jesus, face to face when I am with him in heaven, but until then, I will continue to thank God for my faith, and I will continue to ask him to grow my faith.

In 2 Corinthians, St Paul says: that we walk by faith, not by sight (2 Cor. 5:7). Here, sight not only refers to our physical eyes, but it includes all the five senses that I mentioned earlier. These are our senses of hearing, seeing, smelling, tasting, and touching. Hence, what Paul says is that we cannot live by the five senses alone; we need to have faith.

Faith is the sight of the inward eye. Faith sees the invisible, believes the incredible and receives the impossible. Faith is daily walking hand in hand with God, just like we heard in the faith stories of Elizabeth our Queen, footballer Marcus Rashford, and from Simon and Miranda's stories. Our Christian life would be transformed if we genuinely walked by faith instead of sight.

I end with some questions for us all to reflect upon.

In faith, will you walk daily with God? Will you allow Him to lead and guide you in life? Will you feed your faith by spending time reading and studying his Holy word? Will you spend time with God cultivating your faith through prayer and praise, allowing Him to reveal Himself to you? Will you surround yourself with other people, passionate for God, who will pray with you when your faith is weakened and remind you of God's faithfulness to you in the past?

The last question again, but flipped around:

Will you surround yourself with other people, passionate for God, who you will pray with when their faith is weakened and remind them of God's faithfulness to them in the past?

As we move into a time of reflection and prayer about what our faith means to us, we will listen to a worship song performed by Keith and Kristyn Getty called By Faith.

The song speaks of how believers today are travelling on the same journey of faith as those from past generations. We are **all** called to fix our eyes on Jesus and walk by faith and not by sight until the day we see Jesus, face to face. After our time of reflection, I will finish with a prayer.

Loving God, we thank you that we stand in a long line of believers who have been faithful through the ages. You have been leading your people through trial and difficulty, and you have always set hope for today and hope for a better tomorrow before them. We pray that you would bless us in our time as we seek to be as faithful as those who have gone before us. May we, too, know the faith which is filled with hope in things not seen.

Amen