

Sunday 2nd October

Habakkuk 1:1-4, 2:1-4

2 Timothy 1:1-14

Luke 17:5-10

I've been away this week at a Christian conference centre called Lee Abbey on the North Devon Coast. I was on a course there, and at the same time as the course that I was on there was a large group of people taking part in a walking week. There were a lot of people there, so you can imagine there was a lot of potential for talking to others over meals. And particularly at the start of the week there were many of those general questions as we sought to find out a bit more about those around us. Where do you come from? Have you been here before? You know the kind of thing.

And one question we often ask when finding out about someone is *What do you do?* It's a totally understandable question to ask as it does tell us something about the person, but it doesn't really get to the heart of who that person is, what particular things make that person special, what things are important to them. It's a question that seeks to define someone by what they do rather than by who they are.

The course I was on was about looking at the types of people we are. The things that motivate us and mould our personalities. The things that affect the ways we behave and respond to situations. It was to help us recognise the ways we sometimes make unhealthy choices based on the make up of our personality, and so to help us make better decisions. It was concerned not so much about what we do but about who we really are and why we do those things. In fact one of the tutors on the course admitted that she had mis-typed her husband in terms of his personality for many years as she concentrated on the things he did (which she could see) rather than his motivations (which only he could see). This all of course reflects that we are human beings, not human doings. Our essence is in who we are rather than what we do.

But sadly we do all too often define each other and judge each other by what we do.

There is much in the New Testament about the balance between what we do and who we are, often expressed as the difference between "works" (what we do) and faith – in terms of what is at the very core of our being.

Paul talks of us being saved or justified in the sight of God by our faith, not by our works. In other words we can never earn our way back to God, it's about trusting in what he has done for us through the death and resurrection of Jesus. He bases his arguments on the last few words we heard this morning from the prophet Habakkuk *the righteous live by their faith*. Elsewhere in the New Testament James in his letter

balances this by saying that faith without works is dead. In other words for our faith to mean anything it has to be reflected in what we do – in how we live out our lives.

It is all too easy for us to concentrate too much on what we do and forget about the importance of faith and trust, or to concentrate so much on what we believe that it ceases to influence the way we live our lives. I think today's readings can help us as we seek to find a balance point for ourselves.

In the gospel the disciples ask Jesus about faith. They sense that their faith is not as strong as it should be. Jesus responds by telling a story about a master and his servant, and how the servant's purpose in life was to be totally dedicated to his master.

Its an odd story and it doesn't seem on the surface to have much to do with what he says about faith, but I guess what Jesus is saying is that the depth of our faith is about our total commitment to God. The faith he is talking about is demonstrated by God being at the very centre of who we are and therefore the motivation for all we do.

And in his letter to Timothy Paul talks first of Timothy's strong faith, and then reminds him of his calling to preach the gospel – to follow the example of Paul in what he would do. Again, his deeds, his works, his preaching the gospel message flowing from what he believed. A natural progression from our trust in God to the way we live.

We all want the best for our children and grandchildren, for our nephews and nieces, for those we love and care about. And we spend much time in showing them how to behave; in showing them what's right and what's wrong – both by what we say and by what we do ourselves.

And there's nothing wrong with that of course. But what if we were to be more like Lois and Eunice?

Recall those verses from the letter to Timothy:

I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that lived first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, lives in you.

I love the picture Paul paints in this letter. It's a very down to earth and human picture. The picture of Timothy and his mother Eunice and Grandmother Lois. its something well worth considering today – which is as I am sure you all know

National Grandparents Day. It speaks of faith being handed down from one generation to another. Of Timothy's faith being caught rather than taught.

Perhaps many of us can relate to that. Our faith – the reason we are here – is something we owe to our parents or grandparents, or maybe an Aunt or a good friend or someone else. A faith that was first in them and has since grown in us. Because of something they said or did, or just because of who they were. Perhaps we can't identify a time when that faith became ours, it simply developed within us and became part of us. And now it's at the heart of all we are.

So this morning I want us to ponder about handing on our faith. About living in such a way that those closest to us don't just follow the example of our actions, but pick up and take on board for themselves what drives us, what is at the heart of our being – our faith in God. Our trust in what God has done for us through Jesus's death and resurrection. So that they too can share the faith we have, and on that faith build their lives.

So I am going to leave a few moments of quiet now. Time for us first to thank God for those who were instrumental in our faith – be they parents, grandparents, church leaders or whoever. And then to bring to God in the quiet those who we care about and pray for, those who we would dearly love to catch our faith as Timothy caught the faith of his mother and grandmother.