

## Bennochy Church: 2nd October 2016

*"The fundamental fact of existence is that this trust in God, this faith, is the firm foundation under everything that makes life worth living. It's our handle on what we can't see. The act of faith is what distinguished our ancestors, set them above the crowd." (Hebrews 11: 1-2, Message)*

How do we make hope concrete and the invisible certain? It is easier to place our hope in that which we can touch and better still, control. It is easier to have certainly in that which we can see. The paradox of faith is the dilemma of our belief in God. For God is touched, not with hands, but hearts and God is seen in acts and words of love, compassion, and justice.

*A modern day parable*

*A blind boy sat on the steps of a building with a hat by his feet. He held up a sign which said: "I am blind, please help." There were only a few coins in the hat.*

*A man was walking by. He took a few coins from his pocket and dropped them into the hat. He then took the sign, turned it around, and wrote some words. He put the sign back so that everyone who walked by would see the new words.*

*Soon the hat began to fill up. A lot more people were giving money to the blind boy.*

*That afternoon the man who had changed the sign came to see how things were. The boy recognized his footsteps and asked, "Were you the one who changed my sign this morning? What did you write?"*

*The man said, "I only wrote the truth. I said what you said but in a different way." I wrote: "Today is a beautiful day but I cannot see it."*

*Both signs told people that the boy was blind. But the first sign simply said the boy was blind. The second sign told people that they were so lucky that they were not blind.*

Maybe the greatest barrier to faith is that God is not under our control. God is never 'packaged' neatly by our understanding of him, yet down through the centuries, obvious in its most extreme forms, violence and persecution have been carried out in God's name, because one group of people have said, you do not understand God as we do. Not only do they seek to control others, but what they believe, they seek to control God himself, making God in their own image.

In Luke 17 the disciples are struggling with the idea of unlimited forgiveness, Jesus had said to them,

*"Be alert. If you see your friend going wrong, correct him. If he responds, forgive him. Even if it's personal against you and*

*repeated seven times through the day, and seven times he says, 'I'm sorry, I won't do it again,' forgive him."*

Well, if that is what is required, the disciples recognised they did not have enough faith. In their minds, greater faith than they had, is now required, but I don't think they expected the answer they got. The response of Jesus is hard hitting. Greater faith? If only you had faith the size of a tiny mustard seed, what great things you could do! Forgive someone seven times? Jesus is saying, faith the size of a mustard seed is powerful enough to uproot a mulberry tree with its considerable root structure, or in the words of Matthew, even move mountains! An impossible act, without faith.

What this passage says to me is this, we don't need to be people of great faith to do great things. Think about this, do you need faith to do something easy? Probably not. Faith is shown when things seem impossible, and we carry on anyway. That is the paradox. The possibility of the impossible. That was the point of the examples of faith given by the writer of the book of Hebrews, beginning with Abraham. An old man, becomes the father of many nations! He journeys into the unknown trusting God. Now that, is a miracle of faith.

Think of the things made possible today by modern science, from health care to space exploration, things that were once considered impossible, but are now part of everyday reality. It all depends on how you understand the word miracle. I believe

there is the miraculous, in the ordinary, and that is where we come in.

If the road ahead seems impossibly hard, our ordinary journey, has nothing miraculous about it, except for one thing, Jesus Christ has promised to walk with us.

If we are unsure of the future ahead, faith does not come in a blinding flash light on the road, but in the miracle of the still small voice of God as we struggle with which way to turn.

### *The Mountain Climber*

They tell the story of a mountain climber who, desperate to conquer the Aconcagua, initiated his climb after years of preparation. But he wanted the glory to himself, therefore, he went up alone. He started climbing and it was becoming later, and later. He did not prepare for camping, but decided to keep on going.

Soon it got dark. Night fell with heaviness at a very high altitude. Visibility was zero. Everything was black. There was no moon, and the stars were covered by clouds.

As he was climbing a ridge at about 100 meters from the top, he slipped and fell. Falling rapidly he could only see blotches of darkness that passed. He felt a terrible sensation of being sucked in by gravity. He kept falling... and in those anguishing

moments good and bad memories passed through his mind. He thought certainly he would die.

But then he felt a jolt that almost tore him in half. Yes! Like any good mountain climber he had staked himself with a long rope tied to his waist. In those moments of stillness, suspended in the air he had no other choice but to shout: "HELP ME GOD. HELP ME!"

All of a sudden he heard a deep voice from heaven... "What do you want me to do?"

"SAVE ME."

"Do you REALLY think that I can save you?"

"OF COURSE, MY GOD."

"Then cut the rope that is holding you up."

There was another moment of silence and stillness. The man just held tighter to the rope. The rescue team says that the next day they found a frozen mountain climber hanging strongly to a rope...

TWO FEET OFF THE GROUND.

If we feel that we are left to journey alone, look out for God's angels, his messengers, the ordinary but miraculous pilgrims who travel with us, in unseen certainty and in invisible hope, with a silent and strong faith, in Jesus Christ. Amen.