

## **Open Door Talk 8 March 26 Hebrews 11:1-3 and 12:1-3**

Over the course of this term, we have been looking at the letter to the Hebrews which we have noted is more like a sermon than a letter. It was certainly meant to be read out. The author has been encouraging the listeners to the sermon, or letter, to encourage each other in their journeys of faith, it has been a reminder that we have a compassionate great High Priest in Jesus who sits on a throne and who we can approach because of what he has done for us, we no longer do we have to offer sacrifices or for sacrifices to be offered on our behalf.

This morning we have reached Hebrews 11, and Joanne read the beginning of that chapter in the first part of this morning's reading, in which we are reminded about faith. Last summer if you happened to be here and can remember that far back we thought about trust and faith.

The writer says that

'Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.'

These were important words for the people the writer was addressing who were tired and weary and were beginning to stray away from their faith.

Having faith is not always very easy— the writer was saying that faith is about having confidence in God here and now, today,

even when there are difficulties all around, and there are many in our world. God promises peace, justice, mercy and grace and God's promises can be trusted.

So faith is about our inward confidence – we know something deep within ourselves – we might even describe it as 'knowing in our knowers' – something deeply intuitive which we might not even be able to explain.

But faith is also about something outward – the reality of God's promises coming to fruition as we move forward; something about the future – that God has everything in control and that one day there will be no more mourning or crying or pain as it says in the Book of Revelation.

We cannot see faith, but faith helps us to perceive that the world is an expression of God's love and is held God's hands.

If you have a Bible you will see that in chapter 11 the writer then goes on to give lots examples of people who had faith, people who are called the Heroes of the faith – by faith they received approval or more literally they received testimony – they received their testimony from God - they showed that they were on the right path, that they were following God's ways

But these heroes of the faith are a rather motley bunch of folk who God spoke to in many and various ways as the writer states at the beginning of chapter 1. There is Abel, Enoch,

Noah, Isaac, Abraham, Moses, Rahab, Barak, David and the list goes on.

Some of these names may be very familiar to you, but others perhaps less so. The writer described all these great heroes of faith in a rhetorical device which builds and builds, stirring up the people's excitement as one familiar name (which they would have been to the first listeners) after another are called out.

We told about all these people to encourage and inspire us; although it always strikes me that some of these characters are far from perfect. Abraham did not trust in God's promise that Sarah would bare him a child, David was not faithful and arranged to have a woman's husband killed so that he could marry her... just to give a couple of examples. But I find that a comfort – God using frail and broken humans just like us to bring about his plans– these heroes are ordinary people but they had faith and followed God.

The list of heroes is a little bit like the saints whose lives we now remember. In the church calendar there are many saints, again some well know and some much less familiar. The saints are people whose faith and lives we learn about and give thanks for – and knowing about them can inspire us on our own journeys of faith.

Just like the Heroes of the faith that the writer of Hebrews describes, the saints are also part of the Crowd of Witnesses: They are our Christian mothers and fathers who have gone before us. They are people who have all lived by faith and we are encouraged by them to do the same. They are like a heavenly crowd who are cheering us on as we live our Christian lives.

If you have ever run a race or competed in another sporting event you will know just how important supporters are. When I ran the London marathon quite a few years ago now, like many other people I had my name on my vest. I was sometimes a little confused when people shouted out me name but was so grateful for their support and encouragement, especially when I had got beyond the 20-mile marker post because I had not run any further than that in training. And I know my daughter was very grateful for a small group of family and friends who were her support crew when she competed in Hyrox at the end of last year. Being cheered on and words of encouragement are so important

The writer to the Hebrews says we are to run our lives as Christians, and we should be encouraged knowing we have lots of supporters in heaven cheering us on and we have each other. Sometimes people say, “why should I go to church” and one of the reasons is that we can’t live as Christians by

ourselves we need others to help us on our way. We all need support, encouragement and fellowship.

And, we are called to fix our eyes on Jesus, our Great High Priest who is the ultimate champion who has gone ahead of us.

The writer also emphasises that we need to shake off everything that stops us running our Christian races – unless you happen to be in the military we don't run with a huge rucksack or other things that might slow us down and make the journey difficult.

This is rather appropriate as we are currently in the season of Lent. Lent is a time when we are encouraged to examine our own lives – what are the sins, the things we do wrong that are still weighing us down? What are the things that distract us from going deeper in our relationship with God? Maybe spending time with people that do not help us and lead us away from God? Maybe habits like spending too much time on our screens and looking at social media? Or maybe we have other things that occupy far too much of our time that are unhelpful?

The writer to the Hebrews is encouraging his first listeners and us too, to lay these things down, to give them to God so that we can focus our eyes on Jesus and on the journey that lies ahead of each one of us.

We are urged to keep on going and not to grow weary or faint hearted whatever is happening around us and instead to fix our eyes on Jesus who is the ultimate champion and from whom we can obtain the strength to run the race that is set before us.