

SERMON: Sunday – 2 October 2022 – Rev Alistair Cowper

It's Time for Faith

2 Timothy 1:1-14

Luke 17:5-10

What can Jesus be talking about - faith and duty? That his followers were to say (to their Master) "We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty."? What has that got to do with having faith that can command trees to be uprooted and planted in the sea?

Well on one level, I think it's about using the faith one has rather than becoming stuck in a dependency relationship which only ever asks for more.

Yes it's good to hunger for more but not if one isn't employing what one has in the meantime.

Real servanthood exists in servants using the resources they have at hand. And getting on with the job before them. Admit the imperfection of the present moment. Looking forward in faith to the day when all will be well.

Paul encourages Timothy to fan into flame the gift he has already been given. And notice how Paul acknowledges that faith has been handed down through the generations - from Timothy's grandmother Lois and thereafter his mother Eunice. Faith is passed on in families. But it's also passed on in other ways. Paul speaks of passing on or imparting a gift of faith to Timothy through the laying on of hands.

Telling him that the gift he has, of the Holy Spirit within, gives him power, love and self—discipline, even if suffering on account of one's faith.

"don't be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner. Rather, join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God" (2 Timothy 1:9).

And, "Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you – guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us" (2 Timothy 1:14).

The Holy Spirit gift to us is given to share like the gifts we share at harvest.

I came across a commentary on the mustard seed of faith on the Working Preacher website that argued that Jesus was, of course, pointing to quality of faith more than quantity of faith. The disciples asked for more whereas Jesus said they only need a tiny amount of the RIGHT kind.

The commentator wrote this:

“Jesus’ outrageous example of how only a seemingly small amount of the right kind of faith is needed to do incredible things speaks to the simple truths of a gospel faith. Faith is most powerfully expressed and tangibly felt when it is keyed into an action that draws awareness of the kingdom, the commonwealth of God, that is among us and within us, imminent and breaking through in the world”.

He gives the example of Martin Luther King describing the fear that overcame him when he began receiving death threats during the Montgomery bus boycott in the mid-1950s. One night after a particularly troubling phone call, King found himself exasperated, unable to sleep, and ready to quit. While offering a humble, desperate prayer, King says that he felt the presence of God like never before and heard the words speaking to him in the depth of his soul, “Stand up for righteousness, stand up for truth. God will be at your side forever.” As King notes, “the outer situation remained the same, but God had given me inner calm.”

(Martin Luther King, Jr., “The Strength to Love,” in *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1986).

Oh, for just a small amount of the right kind - day by day.

When you think of the number of seeds that one small plant can produce then we know that there is no shortage on the Provider’s part and that there is great potential for seeds to go everywhere and for everyone. The new creation is breaking through everywhere that its seeds have been scattered. So it matters to spread the seeds of faith whenever we can.

Where is it that we need to exercise even just a small amount of the right kind of faith? Is it, as it was for Martin Luther King, to help calm an anxious mind?

I suspect, if you’re like me, then that is definitely an area that requires constant attention. It seems that most of the time there’s no shortage of things to be anxious about.

Changes in the world, changes in family life, changes in the church.

The news this week hit home that, although the trustees of the church had made a decision earlier this year to dispose of a building to free up resources to make us (at least appear) more missional, the draft plan from presbytery is that its Kirknewton Church building which is the one that’s been suggested be disposed of within 2 years.

For many of us, that comes as a shock or as a reason for sadness or anxiety. And the trustees are going to have to decide, on behalf of the congregation, how to respond to this. The Kirk session and board are still looking at the pros and cons of each of the three buildings we have and a visit from the Buildings Officer of the General Trustees tomorrow might help steer that decision..

But let me say, that even if the decision is to dispose of one of our beautiful, historic buildings which has seen decades or centuries of worship, that would not mean the closing of the church in that part of our parish. It would not mean the end of the church in that part of our parish. Because KN and EC are one church and the work of the church will continue. And the church will always have a presence throughout the full extent of our parish and beyond..

Nevertheless, change can cause heartbreak and I acknowledge that. Some will be angry and possibly leave the church and its for moments like these that we ask, what does the right kind of faith look like? And where, in the midst of huge change, is the kingdom breaking new ground?

How can we guard the good deposit of the Spirit within from going cold and instead fan it into flame with the inner peace that knows that all is well and will be well?