

Sermon Sunday 9th August 2020

Romans 10: 5 – 15 and Matthew 14: 22 – 33

In my teenage years I did some abseiling, sliding down from height attached to a rope. Now this was before the days of harnesses and carabiners and thin strong manmade ropes. The sisal rope went under your body between the legs and over the shoulder which you held behind you with one hand in a strong leather glove, not the most comfortable of positions and then you stepped out over the edge and let yourself down, kicking off the rock or surface with your straight legs. There was a safety rope which I had secured around my body with a bowline on the bite which if I fell meant this rope and knot would hold me under my shoulders. I had faith in my equipment especially the bowline on the safety rope, which I had tied.

The two readings today are all about faith, faith in God the Father, God the Son and the God Holy Spirit. Our faith which will protect us, guide us and keep us as one with God in all we do and say even when it gets tough and we have doubts or we think everything is getting on top of us. By holding firm in faith, God will bring us through.

In the Letter to the Romans Paul is writing about faith. In the preceding verses Paul writes about the Jews who tried to live in righteousness by the Law given to Moses, which we know they failed

to do so many times. Paul tells us that in Deuteronomy Chapter 30 verse 14 Moses told the Jews 'the word is near you on your lips and in your heart.' Yet they still ignored it and used the Law for their own purposes and interpretation. I think put simply many did not have faith, faith in God. Paul tells us the 'word' in Deuteronomy means 'the word of faith that we proclaim.' It is this faith through Jesus which Paul is explaining to the Romans to hold onto and it is a faith for all; verse 11 'there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is lord of all and is generous to all who call upon Him.' At times of emergencies it is a recorded fact that people seek God to help them; they reach out to God and seek help. This is a step to faith and I wonder how many keep this faith when the emergency passes. We know, as those people do, that God is always there and we can call upon Him. We grow in faith throughout our earthly lives, it is not something which we just acquire, it has to be nurtured. I said earlier that there are times when we have doubt and our faith may falter, I know I have experienced this in my lifetime especially in times of serious family illness. However, when I have come through these difficult periods in my life, I know my faith is stronger; why, because I know God has always been with me, there for me supporting me and my family. Paul sums faith up very succinctly for me in verse 13 'Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.' Saved through faith! It is our role not only to grow our own

faith but to spread the word of faith to all we meet, all we do and all we say, just as Paul was telling the Romans in his letter.

In the Gospel Reading there are two elements for me, the first being in verse 23. Jesus after the feeding of the 5,000 sought solitude, as He did on many occasions, to spend time with God in prayer. Jesus made room in His busy schedule for prayer, do you? If you develop the discipline of spending time alone with God it will help you to grow in faith. Yes, I know you live a busy life and there is always something to do but please seek this time alone with God, first thing in the morning or last thing at night, it does not matter when please just do so.

The second element is walking on water and Peters reaction to Jesus walking on the water. This is not Peter testing Jesus and in fact in chapter 4 verse 7 we are told not to do this 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.' Peter saw Jesus and reacted in faith by stepping onto the water; he did not show fear like the other disciples in the boat tossed about by the storm. All the time Peter focused on Jesus he could walk on the storm-tossed waters; when he suddenly realised what he was doing his faith faltered and he began to sink. However, Jesus saved him in this tough situation. We may not be able to walk on water but in those tough situations or circumstances in our own lives, which we will inevitably have to face or walk through if we do not look towards Jesus we too can falter or despair

or sink. We need at such times to keep our eyes and thoughts on Jesus to maintain our faith. By doing so I have found my faith is stronger, why because I know Jesus and God are always there for me.

Through faith comes forgiveness from God or is it the other way round? I personally don't think it matters but it is something we must never forget. When we ignore God, it is we who shut God out, not God shutting us out. People come to God to seek faith and forgiveness at all different ages and after very different circumstances in their lives or upbringings. In this time of 'black lives matter' I often wonder how many of the people being pilloried now sought forgiveness from God for what they had done, later in their lives or put more simply regretted what they had done in their earlier lives. I am constantly brought back to the example of J. Newton, a captain of a slave trader ship who saw the error of his ways and sought forgiveness. Newton wrote the hymn Amazing Grace when he gave up the slave trade; I am always choked by the words 'Amazing grace, How, sweet the sound that saved a poor wretch like me. I once was lost but now am found, was blind but now I see.'

If we confess our sins to God and truly seek forgiveness and change the way we live we will receive forgiveness and our faith will grow and be strengthened. It is never too late!

It is going to be difficult but hold onto faith and you will come through.

Let us pray. Almighty God you gave your Son Jesus Christ to break the power of evil. Free us from darkness and temptation and bring us to eternal light and joy this day and for evermore. Amen