

Year C Proper 19 10th August 2025

Genesis 15: 1-6. Hebrews 11: 1-3 & 8-16. Luke 12:32-40.

Journey in Faith for faith is a journey

Was Jesus speaking to us as well as the people listening to him when he said, “Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom”?

And by ‘little’ did Jesus mean small in number? No. I think it is used as a form of endearment, a warm communication of deep affection. I think the latter is far more in keeping with Jesus’ compassion, care and love for all who he meets, and applies to us here, and all other followers of the way of Christ, as well as those who don’t follow him.

In Matthew’s gospel (Matt 9:36) Jesus refers to the people as ‘sheep without a shepherd’, indicating how vulnerable he feels many people were; no sense of direction or purpose, no one to guide and safely lead them. A friend of mine said that sheep get into difficulty because with their heads down, munching on grass and other tasty bits, they don’t look up, they lose their way, get stuck and don’t know how to get back. They get lost one mouthful at a time. I think people can get equally lost without Jesus as their guiding light.

Let us look at that first verse again and pick up another aspect of it.

“Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom”

Notice the word ‘for’ which creates a linkage between ‘do not be afraid’ and ‘your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. We cannot be certain what the listeners were afraid of. Maybe in what the preceding teachings Jesus had taught them, that subverted their understanding of how to survive; don’t store up riches, live day to day like the birds of the field, etc.

The people then were, as many people are in this age, anxious and uncertain about what tomorrow would bring. In our times we know that many people

suffer from one degree or another of anxiety, sadly many with levels of anxiety that really hinder their flourishing and stops them leading the sort of life that God yearns for them and that Jesus described and enabled people to experience through his healings.

When we are anxious we cause ourselves damage, psychologically and physically. We close down our imagination, our creativity, our joy for life. Our ability to live well in community is also reduced. We can become afraid for the future, for ourselves and for others. In that frame of mind, we are incapable of enjoying the present; enjoying, appreciating and being thankful to God for the simplest of things.

Jesus' answer to this state of mind is to show deep concern for us and repeat his gentle phrase, "Do not be afraid". I imagine him saying it in a soft loving voice, full of concern for our wellbeing. It is a phrase that calls us back into a loving relationship with God, where we can let go of our deepest anxieties and worries, 'under the shadow of His wing', as the poetic language of Compline reminds us.

Jesus clearly links our ability to live in the present, aware of who we are and what the wondrous possibilities are for us today in the choices we make, with God's kingdom. We can only experience it, and bring glimpses of it to others if we are present, in the here and now.

Jesus is asking us to have faith, and to make decisions and hold values that means we live a life that reflects what our faith promises us. We are to hold a tension between the ideal of God's kingdom on earth and the reality of the present world in all its messiness, uncertainties and complexities, meanness and polarisations of 'them' and 'us'. Jesus asks us to live as if God's kingdom is here already. With and in faith, we are called live a life where we seek to follow the way of Christ, loving our neighbour and doing unto others as we wish others do unto us. Each day we are challenged to live Christ's way, whilst knowing that most of the world does not.

Abraham lived in a world where he was successful and where previous generations had lived and prospered. God invited Abraham to stare at the stars and believe that he would have that many descendants even though Sarah was

barren. Abraham, in faith, journeyed from the land he knew to unknown lands in the west. A journey in faith, for faith is a journey.

Our reading from Hebrews tells us that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob 'were strangers and foreigners on the earth'. Their faith led them to live differently, and to journey on into new territory. Abraham was credited as being righteous due to his belief in God's word and direction for him. Abraham had such trust in God at the root of his faith. Paul reminds us that 'faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the assurance of things not seen.'

How does our faith impact on our lives today? Do we base it on doctrines and creeds, a form of intellectual assent? Or is faith that sense of being alive, humbled and inspired when we hear Jesus say to us 'Do not be afraid for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom'?

Does our faith call us out on a journey, to see how we can partner with God to bring change, good change, to this fallen world? Faith in this sense is not a destination, but a deep desire to journey, to walk with God in hope and gratitude. Faith is a longing for a better world, for all people.

Faith is deciding to start walking with God without knowing the destination, to use our imaginations, our creativity, our love, to make good ripples across our community and further afield. Faith is being like an alert attendant caring for a lamp until it is needed by the master.

So, faith is active, alert and able and willing to respond, to live peaceably in the present yet desiring God's kingdom to come. Faith is responding to the needs of God's kingdom, not holding back, not ignoring the call, not staying put. And definitely not being afraid, for God has been pleased to give you the kingdom.

Let us all enjoy and welcome this journey in faith for faith is a journey.