

## **Where is your faith?**

**by Rev John Castle**

A sermon given on Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2025 at St Michael's Church, Sandhurst

Reading: Luke 8:22-25

### **Introduction: "O ye of little faith"**

I wonder when you last heard this phrase – or when you last used it? It's come into the English language as a humorous way of responding to someone who doubted that another person could achieve a task they had set themselves, for example fixing a car or finishing a difficult bit of dress-making. As you've probably guessed, the phrase comes from the Bible.

In today's gospel reading, Jesus rebukes his disciples for not trusting that God would save them, as their boat is being overwhelmed by the waves. In Luke's version of this story Jesus asks, "Where is your faith?"<sup>1</sup> In Matthew's version of the same story Jesus asks "Why are you afraid, O you of little faith?"<sup>2</sup> And in Mark's Gospel Jesus' words are "Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?"<sup>3</sup>

### **Faith in a time of crisis**

Here the disciples are in crisis, afraid that they will be drowned. A few chapters later in Matthew's gospel, when Peter sees Jesus walking on the lake, Jesus invites him to try

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 8:25

<sup>2</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version\*](#) (Mt 8:26) The phrase "O you of little faith" translates one Greek word ὀλιγόπιστοι from oligos (little) and pistos (believing, trusting)

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 8:26

it himself. Peter steps out onto the water in faith, but then his faith fails him and he begins to sink. We read that

Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him, saying to him, “O you of little faith, why did you doubt?”<sup>4</sup>

### **Faith in the everyday**

In these two situations faith is required in the face of a crisis. But Jesus also uses the phrase “O you of little faith” in the context of trusting God to provide for daily needs. In Matthew chapter 6, Jesus is telling his disciples not to worry about daily needs such as food and clothing:

But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?<sup>5</sup>

Later, in Matthew chapter 16, the disciples are worrying because they have forgotten to bring bread with them:

But Jesus, aware of this, said, “O you of little faith, why are you discussing among yourselves the fact that you have no bread?”<sup>6</sup>

He goes on to remind them of their recent experience in seeing five thousand fed from five loaves and two fish. In these examples we see Jesus rebuking his disciples for their lack of faith. According to Jesus, we need to remember how God has provided in the past and trust him to provide for our needs now. People are generally more likely to turn to God when faced with an emergency or a situation that is beyond their control. But surely if we want to be prepared

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<sup>4</sup> Matthew 14:31ESV

<sup>5</sup> Matthew 6:30 ESV cp Luke 12:28

<sup>6</sup> Matthew 16:8 ESV

for trusting God in a crisis, it is a good idea to learn to trust God in everyday matters.

As Sarah Ashton pointed out in last week's sermon, most of us in this part of the UK are living in material comfort. It's easy to be complacent when we have plenty to eat, safe and warm homes and good healthcare. We need to remind ourselves that ultimately all good things come from God, and recognise our dependence on him.

### **Acknowledging God**

Brian Walpole was a successful Concorde pilot, married with three children, who at the age of 47 met a journalist at a dinner. The journalist asked him where God featured in his many successes. Brian's thoughts were that his successes were due to skill and hard work, but the conversation set him thinking, and after a while he began to attend church and came to re-evaluate his life. In a book which was recently published, Brian wrote:

"I began to understand that everything I had, had been given to me by God: my ability to fly aeroplanes, my wife, my children, the opportunities I had been encouraged to take, and my career path – everything had come from God"<sup>7</sup>.

In this way of thinking, God is no longer an optional extra to our full and busy lives, or just a kind of emergency service we call on when everything else has failed. God now takes centre stage. He is the origin and the source of everything, and we see our lives within the context of his wise and loving

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<sup>7</sup> *Captain Concorde: The true story of one man's remarkable journey of flight and faith* by Brian Walpole and Graham Lacey (Malcolm Down Publishing Ltd 2024), quoted in the Church Times article, 7<sup>th</sup> Feb 2025

purposes. As St Paul put it, quoting from a Greek philosopher, “In him we live and move and have our being.”<sup>8</sup>

If we recognise our dependence on God, and learn to thank him for the blessings we have received and trust him for his provision in the future, we should be in a better position to respond with faith to the unexpected crisis when it comes.

### **Does God care?**

In today’s episode, the disciples are caught unawares by the sudden storm. Though several of them are experienced fishermen, the boat fills with water and they panic. In Mark’s version of the story they wake Jesus with the words “Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?”<sup>9</sup>

Sometimes it can seem as if God is asleep and indifferent to our problems. That, of course, is not the case. Perhaps he is waiting for *us* to take the initiative to bring our needs to him in prayer, rather than him just stepping in and shielding us from difficult experiences. Being a disciple means being someone who is in training, and we all know that we learn best not just by listening to a teacher but by testing out what we’ve learned in real-life situations. As Christians we are not exempted from the problems and challenges of life that everyone else faces. But there is another dimension to our lives which sets us apart from others – it’s our relationship with our heavenly Father.

Like any good parent, God loves us unconditionally and wants the best for us. But good parenting doesn’t mean giving our children everything they want, or mollycoddling

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<sup>8</sup> Acts 17:28 – Paul quotes from Cretan philosopher Epimenides

<sup>9</sup> Mark 4:38 ESV

them so they never get upset or hurt. As my grandfather used to say, “the man who never made any mistakes never made anything”. Children have to learn to deal with disappointment, with pain and with failure. A good parent will let this happen, but will try to make sure the difficult experience is not too much for the child to bear, and will give support and guidance. The same is true of our heavenly Father. We may have to go through some suffering, doubt and uncertainty, but if we turn to God and trust him to help us, he will.

In the letter to the Hebrews, written to Christians who were suffering persecution, we read that we should treat the trials and challenges of life as a tool which God uses to discipline us. This, according to the writer, is a sign of God’s love:

Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children... No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.<sup>10</sup>

## **Trusting God in hardship**

I’ve recently been reading *The Heavenly Man*<sup>11</sup>, the autobiography of Brother Yun, a Chinese pastor who endured many years of imprisonment and torture under the Chinese government for preaching the gospel. One thing that stands out for me is his persistent faith, even under the most inhumane and cruel treatment. Brother Yun developed a very close relationship with God from an early age, and a

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<sup>10</sup> Hebrews 12:7,11 ESV

<sup>11</sup> *The Heavenly Man* by Brother Yun and Paul Hattaway (Oxford: Monarch Books/Lion Hudson 2002)

huge source of his strength was his intimate knowledge of the Bible, much of which he had memorised. This meant that whenever he was facing hardship an encouraging scripture would come to mind that was totally fitting for his situation. If we want to grow closer to God and build up our faith, there's no substitute for reading God's Word. Memorising it is even more useful!

### **Where is our faith?**

Jesus asks his disciples – and us - *Where is your faith?* Perhaps we could supplement that question by asking, where do we *place* our faith, in other words what do we trust in – our financial security, our skills, knowledge and experience, or human institutions? As we think about our lives, the blessings we have received and the things we have achieved, do we put God centre-stage, and acknowledge like the Concorde pilot that everything comes from him? Are we willing to trust him for our future, especially when facing difficult times, suffering and hardship, like Brother Yun?

And what will we do to enable our faith to grow and our relationship with God to deepen? Where is our faith now, and where would we like it to be?