

SERMON: The Power of Faith: Genesis 22.1-2; Mark 9: 2-10; Romans 8.31-34

Dear Father, as we move forward into a new season for our Parish, may we do so with bold faith. Thank you that your Son is for us in all things and with us every step of the way. Amen.

One of the important messages the Spirit graciously gave us during our week of prayer was to prepare for His harvest. In Matthew 9 verses 38 and 39 Jesus tells his disciples: *“The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest.”* The word translated as “send out” actually has a more dramatic meaning of: “thrust forward”. When I was talking to God about this message I could feel a kernel of doubt within me. Did I really believe that if I asked Jesus to send us disciples to reach out to the people prepared by him to receive His Word, that He would do it? And then I felt a twinge of fear as it dawned on me that maybe I was meant to be one of those disciples! So I said: “Lord, even in my unbelief and fear, I pray that you will send your labourers to West Belconnen to reap the harvest and that you will give to me the courage to be one of them” Immediately, in my mind’s eye, I had a picture of Jesus pushing me from behind, literally thrusting me forward and then there were at least a dozen other people being pushed next to me! We were to do His work and he would be with us as we did it. My fear and doubt were gone.

As I explore our readings today I invite you reflect on this theme of “the power of faith.”

Genesis 22. 1-2

In Genesis 22 we have just two verses, where God tests the faith of Abraham by asking him to sacrifice his son Isaac. The back story is well known. Isaac was born to a 90 year old Sarah and a 99 year old Abraham. He was the long awaited fulfilment of God’s promised covenant. Through Isaac, God’s blessings would flow to many generations. And yet now God is asking the unbelievable: sacrifice Isaac. The faith of Abraham was the rock on which this covenant was built and even in the face of his devastating request, his faith did not flinch. He trusted God completely and as a result Isaac was spared and the Lord told him in verses 16 and 17: *“Because you have done this, and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will indeed bless you, and I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore.”*

There are at least two particular lessons which spring from this account. The first is that faith is both a gift and a choice. God grants us the gift of belief in His Son but it is our choice whether we accept it and act upon it.

The second is that when we do so choose and act, such faith can produce amazing results. As we are tested in this season of change for our Parish, like Abraham, we are called to trust that God's will shall be done and it is good for us!

Mark 9.2-9 The Transfiguration

The transfiguration account in Mark 9 helps us to achieve this level of trust. It opens in verse 2 with the image of Jesus leading three of his disciples, Peter, James and John up a high mountain. The verse ends with the simple description: "And he was transfigured before them". The Greek word used here is the root of the English term "metamorphosis". It implies that something is changing its form **in keeping with its inner reality**. It's like when a caterpillar changes into its true nature of a beautiful butterfly.

And so it was for Jesus. In verse 3 we are told that for a brief moment the inner divinity of Christ shone forth from his human body and his clothes became an incredibly dazzling white. The miracle continues in verse 4 where the disciples see this transformed Jesus talking to Elijah and Moses. The appearance here of the two Prophets, Elijah and Moses is pivotal in showing his disciples that Jesus is both far more than a noble human being AND that he is superior to all the other prophets. In verses 7 and 8, this is confirmed by God himself when the divine cloud descends and the voice proclaims: "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!" Moses and Elijah are gone – the only one left is Jesus, **the Son of God**. All the divine authority of the Old Testament now rests with one person: Jesus. And they need to really listen to what he is telling them!

To find out what that is we only have to go back six days to Chapter 8 verse 31. It is then that Jesus "*began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.*"

God is revealing to these disciples, exactly who Jesus is and what his true mission is. But they weren't listening to him! Think about that for a moment. Even after everything they had seen and heard Jesus do, they still, at this point, didn't get who he really was or what he was meant to do! In verse 10, after being ordered to tell no one about the transfiguration, it says: "So they kept the matter to themselves, **questioning** what this rising from the dead **could mean.**" Like me and you, their doubts were many and yet these same people were destined to lead the early Christian church, boldly proclaiming the gospel no matter what persecution they suffered.

In order to accept this new truth of the suffering Messiah, they had to first undergo their own transformation. This transformation would start in earnest after the resurrection of Jesus and, as other gospel and New Testament passages

confirm, be done through the power of the Holy Spirit. This transformation would start with the disciples, spreading out to the Jews and gentiles and carry on to all future generations, including us! And that's the exciting part! Our own lives, both as individuals and as members of the body of Christ, can, have and will continue to be transformed by our faith in Jesus.

Romans 8:31-34 God is For Us

Apostle Paul was certainly one of the people who experienced this deep change. When he received and acted upon God's gift of faith, he quickly turned from persecutor of Christians to a fervent disciple. By the time he wrote his letter to the church in Rome, he had no doubts about God and Jesus. He explains to the followers there exactly what Jesus' rising from the dead means. He draws us back to the Jewish Father of faith, Abraham. Indeed he uses the very same words to describe God's loyalty to us, as God uses in Genesis 22.16 to describe Abraham's loyalty to Himself. As William Barclay suggests: *"Just as Abraham was so loyal to God that he was prepared to sacrifice his dearest possession for the sake of God, God is so loyal to humanity that He is prepared to sacrifice His only Son for them. Surely, we can trust a loyalty like that for anything!"*

Brothers and sisters, as we discern the best way for our three parishes to collaborate, some changes will happen and any change inevitably brings with it, fear and doubt. As we face those fears, let us take great strength from the words of Paul today. God is for us in all things! Through His Son's death, we have been cleared of all charges related to our sins. We have been justified by God's gracious gift. And far from condemning us, our risen Lord lovingly advocates on our behalf before God's throne. It is to this love that Paul so beautifully invites us to connect with in the rest of Romans 8. In verses 35 to 39 with great fervour and passion, he reminds us that absolutely nothing in the world can ever separate us from the love of God in our Risen Lord, Jesus.

So take great heart my friends. As we act on our faith and move into a new season, we can unhesitatingly trust that Jesus is with us and that He wants only the best possible outcome for us all.

Let me finish in prayer.

Beloved Father, we thank you for your Risen Son. We give him all praise, honour and glory. We humbly place our trust in Him and pray that the power of our faith will reap a great harvest in West Belconnen! Amen