

Pentecost 12 – 7<sup>th</sup> August 16

Readings: Isaiah 1; 1, 10-20; Psalm 50: 1-8, 23-24; Hebrews 11: 1-3, 8-16; Luke 12: 32-40

Next Tuesday I've been invited by Lizzie Gaitskell, the Chaplain at West Moreton Anglican College to speak to students on the subject "Faith is....Faith is not....." By the way, you as a Parish should be justifiably proud of what has been achieved at WestMac under God's grace. The school came from initiatives from within this parish 25 years ago. Founder's Day a couple of weeks ago was the 23<sup>rd</sup> – so continue to take an interest in the College, continue to pray for it. We can learn much from them and they can learn from us. It was terrific to have their assistance at Choral Evensong last Sunday night. Neil Flottman from the school conducted and we had about 20 students in the choir. Neil said to me afterwards that they enjoyed it – just imagine a group of today's teenagers enjoying Book of Common Prayer Choral Evensong – but there you go.....and Neil wasn't just being polite.

Anyway back to Faith is..... If I stand up before the students next Tuesday and hold forth with "Now, faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen"<sup>1</sup>, I can imagine the reaction. I think I'll have lost them in the first 10 seconds of the 10 minutes I've got. But if I start to tell a story, maybe I'll be in with a chance. And the author of the Letter to the Hebrews starts to tell a story. In fact all of Chapter 11 consists of various stories of people of faith leading up to Chapter 12, the example of Jesus. And the particular story we have this morning is of Abraham and Sarah – we're told the story of Abraham and Sarah following God's promises that although they're childless, they'll become parents of a nation. Just imagine it. One commentator calls it an impossible possibility. Abraham and Sarah's faith is portrayed as trusting God with the unseen and unknown. They launch out – you might say recklessly – with no promises and few guarantees. They don't even know where they are going. This almost foolish faith is maybe anathema to those these days set their GPS to drive down to the shops. The story of Abraham and Sarah invites us to be risk takers, willing to go forth with only a dream to guide us toward God's horizons. This elderly couple gives up everything secure to follow a promise. By comparison, most of us – and I include myself - are far too prudent and careful. Few of us, even the most faithful, will leave everything for God. So we're left perhaps with an uneasy conscience. In so many ways nowadays we're urged to be risk averse. In parishes we have to pay so much attention to risk management. I know for myself the tension involved in that all the administrative effort required of parish clergy and church administrators and churchwardens in compliance with various kinds of risk management tends to divert our energies from what we believe we should really be about – at that's God's mission. The people in this place who had the vision for West Moreton Anglican College 25 years ago and more launched out in faith into the unknown. I'm sure there were all sorts of uncertainties – but if you've been to the campus recently you'll be amazed at what has been achieved. So at the very least our faith should lead us to consider becoming prudent risk takers, open to setting aside certainty to follow God's call.

And, then, there's Jesus in Luke's Gospel continuing the theme of the past couple of weeks about our personal and communal treasures. What is truly most important to us? Are we willing to let go of everything to do the great work God calls us toward? Jesus promises an unfailing treasure in heaven, that is a realm that is unending and all-satisfying. Entry into this realm, however, requires willingness to take the risks of faith, to launch out on a moment's notice, and the possibility that we have to

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<sup>1</sup> Hebrews 11:1

become what one commentator calls “downwardly mobile” for the sake of following God’s vision. Again maybe we can feel conflicted or have an uneasy conscience as we read Jesus’ admonition. Of course want enough security in this lifetime and we have obligations to family. I don’t want to take myself off the hook. One of the things I have had to be careful with in undertaking this locum is long term financial security for Libbie and I. Unless we’re careful we run the risk of losing certain Centrelink benefits which contribute to our financial security now that we’re retired from full time ministry. So I have to confront my own need for security first before placing undue burdens on anyone else. But this passage does call us I think to examine our consciences to determine what is truly important to us. One description of what faith is involves spectacles. The late Bishop Leslie Newbiggin in his book “The Gospel in a Pluralist Society” likened faith to the spectacles through which we view ourselves and the world. Faith calls us to perceive things from a different perspective. For example, when I retired from full-time parish ministry I had to think about how I perceived my vocation. I’m always grateful for the wisdom of a retired bishop who said to me that when you retire your vocation changes – you have much more of a vocation to your family. That made a lot of sense to me. So at the moment looking at my own life, I believe that at present God’s call on my life involves caring for my son in his illness and making time for that. Other things may have to wait. All of us make choices all the time. Faithfulness to God may involve caring for our families first and insuring their well-being before putting ourselves at risk or devoting hours and days to other things. But the Gospel this morning also tells us that God can creep up on us at any time and we need to be prepared for God’s call to lead us in unexpected directions.

Isaiah’s vocation was a prophetic one. He challenges the people to let go of apathy, to become aware of what is going on around them and to transform their worship from ritual to justice seeking. Again, we’re asked to examine our consciences. Prayer and praise and living through the liturgical year as we do is important to our faith and sustains it, but our most dynamic worship is fruitless if we become inwardly focussed turn our backs on the poor and those who cry for justice. In worship we seek to love God with all our heart and mind and soul and strength and our neighbours as ourselves. Worship is not just about us. All worship must be grounded in grace but must also inspire us to action; “Go in peace to love and serve the Lord”, we’re told. Loving and serving are action words. How we love and serve will differ from community to community and congregation to congregation. Still, it must touch base with the real suffering in our neighbourhood and the world around us. I always like hymns with a prophetic theme to keep this before us as we worship, and having said that, I don’t think we’ve got one this week. But think back to last Sunday and the final hymn :God of grave and God of glory” which includes the words “Cure your children’s warring madness; bend our pride to your control; shame our wanton selfish gladness, rich in things and poor in soul.” I can never forget that the prophet Amos was much more scarifying than Isaiah. Amos speaking prophetically in God’s name said “ I hate, I despise your festivals, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me your burnt-offerings and grain-offerings, I will not accept them; and the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals I will not look upon. Take away from me the noise of your songs; I will not listen to

the melody of your harps. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream".<sup>2</sup>

We are not all social activists or prophets, and yet I see it as part of my vocation to keep that need before us so that we don't become apathetic when it comes to the well-being of the most vulnerable of our community. It's not easy to balance care for our families, the health of our congregations, and social concern. However we're all in this together and even small acts can be life transforming.

Today's readings remind us to seek God's realm in and beyond our daily responsibilities, and to consider constantly the need to give up certain types of security to be faithful to God's presence in the persons in front of us and around the globe. We may have an uneasy conscience at times - but that's good news, for such uneasiness invites us to reflection on what is truly important and on what we may be in faith truly called to do.

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<sup>2</sup> Amos 5:21-24