

Third Sunday after Pentecost
1st June 2008
(Sunday between 29th May & 4th June) Year A
(Other than Trinity Sunday)

1. Faith is a gift from God. In the collect we pray for an increase of faith so that we may step out to answer God's call. In this season after Pentecost we focus on faithfully living in the power of God's Spirit, faithfully obeying his call.
2. Noah was a man of faith belonging to that period of history where he was neither Jewish nor Christian, nevertheless, a man of faith. He is a representative or type of the righteous man who seeks to practise obedience to God according to the law written in his heart; who trusts in God despite all appearances to the contrary, and who endeavours to be true to the image of God which all people bear. (Neil's One Volume Bible Commentary).
3. People come close to God through faith, not through good works, not through legalistic behaviour, not by birth or gender. All people fall short of righteousness by themselves. It is only through faith in the atoning sacrifice of Christ on the cross that we are justified. (Romans).
4. Jesus preached in the Sermon on the Mount about the life of obedience. Faithful people's lives will "bear good fruit" ie by their deeds you will know them. It is not the outward show or what you say that counts most, but what you do. And what you have in your heart. The parable of the wise and foolish men (Matthew 7:24-27) gives a reference to the flood and can be connected to Noah's story.
5. "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness will be added unto you." How do we do this? By faith, trust, obedience, stepping out boldly in the confidence that Jesus' Spirit is with us. Today many Christians seem to have a failure of confidence and a fear of the future. Today's reading will encourage us to be faithful, to trust, to take risks in our mission, confident in our faithful God.

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost
8th June 2008
(Sunday between 5th & 11th June Year A)

1. The title in the NRSV Bible of the NT reading is "God's Promise Realized through Faith". (Romans 4:13-25) Abraham is an example of a man who acted by faith and not by the law so that God's promise of life was fulfilled. Genesis 12:1-9 details the promise and the enormous risk Abram took to set out on the journey. This is the theme of today's readings: that God calls us to life and we need to respond to that call in faith to receive what is promised to us.
3. Matthew (Matt9:9-13) also acts in faith. Matthew seemed to have deliberately rejected God's values. His way of life which you could only describe as 'sick' was despised by the religious leader. With others who were rejected by society he sought out Jesus who offered healing and wholeness Matthew risked stepping out in faith to follow Jesus into a new way of life, even though it involved sacrifice.
4. The leader of the synagogue risked disapproval to seek life for his daughter. Through faith, not law or reason he begged Jesus to save her. The woman, an outcast because of her constant bleeding, reached out in faith to seek healing, risking censure. God's promise of new life through Jesus was realized in them through faith alone. (Matt 9:18-26)
5. Even today, we can be cynical like the Pharisees who criticized Jesus. In the Church we can sometimes think and act as if God's mercy and forgiveness are reserved for regular church-goers. If someone less 'one of us' approaches our altars we may feel indignant but we forget that faith is not confined to an institution. The Jews had to learn that the descendants of Abraham were those who responded to God in faith. (Romans 4:13-16). So do we.
6. God may be calling us to life, to healing and wholeness, to a new land, to a risky adventure. Our response depends on faith, not law. By stepping out in faith, taking risks, making sacrifices, growing stronger in faith, we will find that God will fulfill his promises, promises fulfilled by grace.

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost
29th June 2008
(Sunday between 26th June & 2nd July Year A)

1. Some people are unfortunate enough to suffer from compulsive behaviour. eg kleptomania, compulsive eating or hand-washing. Something seemingly beyond themselves urges such people to give in. Sin is like that. It pushes and pulls us to behaviour beyond our control. We have a real battle to fight against its power. Even though we know that sinful behaviour is damaging to us and others we can still yield to its compulsive pressure. We can be slaves to sin.
2. Things are not intrinsically evil. Many things we handle every day can be used for good or evil. eg money, knife, pen, paint. Similarly people can be instruments of good or evil. Refer to the prayer "Lord make me an instrument of thy peace".
3. We have choice about how we use our bodies our voices, our hand, our minds, our sexuality, our muscles. Paul (Romans 6:19) says that we have a choice whether our 'member (our bodily parts) are slaves to impurity and iniquity or slaves to righteousness and sanctification. One wonders about the choice Abraham made in Genesis 22:1-14. It was not a choice to kill his Son. We see it as a choice to obey God, a choice which God vindicated by saving Isaac from death.
4. In our baptism into Jesus' death and resurrection we have been freed from slavery to sin. We are now 'enslaved to God' (Romans 6:22). The word 'slavery' still sounds restrictive but think of it like this: we often today talk of 'outcomes'; the outcome of slavery to sin is death; the outcome of slavery to God is sanctification or holiness. This does not mean that sin will not tempt us, pulling us in directions that Christ would not have us take. But if we trust in Christ and put our lives, our wills, our minds in his hands then he can guide us in right ways.
5. If we are enslaved to God we will feel a strong pull to be an instrument of God's reign. Instead of being fraught with fear and self-absorbed with our own wants and desires, we will be more open to the needs of others and to the commands of Christ. We will be open to good; will look for good in others; we will be generous, giving, loving and serving, speaking the truth with courage. 'Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace'.

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost
22nd June 2008
(Sunday between 19th & 25th June Year A)

1. Give examples of people who have found life by losing the life they might otherwise have had. eg Missionaries from Willochra: the Lock families. Frances Cook. Perhaps give an example from your own life where involvement of service in others became for you a life-giving experience.
2. Through death you gain life. This is the fundamental paradox of the Christian faith. It is the fundamental truth of the Resurrection and a basic tenet for living the Christian life. 'Those who find their life will lose it and those who lose their life for my sake will find it'. Those who look out for others will find that they will find better satisfaction and fulfillment than those who seek their own happiness first.
3. Jesus contradicted the popular Jewish belief that the Messiah would bring peace after suffering. The Messiah has indeed come but woes and tribulations would increase. There would be divisions in families. The disciples had to be prepared to have a greater loyalty to Jesus than to members of their own households. Being worthy to be a follower of Jesus meant to be willing 'To take up your cross', to be willing to give oneself totally, even to death, for the sake of service to God and neighbour.
4. These are challenging words to us who elsewhere are bombarded with ideas about self - being self-confident and self-assertive, becoming your true self, reaching your full potential, being successful, doing what you want to do, looking out for yourself. How do these ideas fit in with Jesus' teaching about losing life in order to gain it? This teaching requires a different set of values from hedonistic values of society.
5. Those who follow Christ and take up their cross will be sustained by the power of God. If you give your life to Christ and serve him then you will find the life that is worth having. These words may be applied to individuals or just as easily to a congregation. Those whose lives are focused on their own fulfillment ultimately will die while those who focus outward, bringing life to the community around will live and grow.

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost
15th June 2008
(Sunday between 12th & 18th June Year A)

1. How do you feel about risk-taking? Talk about taking risks with money, relationships, adventures. Sometimes taking risks is fool-hardy, but in some situations taking a risk is necessary to launch into something new and fruitful. Perhaps tell a story of risk-taking in your own life. What were the risks, what was the outcome, was it really risky after all, why did you do it? What difference does it make if you take a risk 'in faith'?
2. Moses took risks to liberate the Jews from Egypt and offer them hope and they took risks in following him! What did they risk—hunger, suffering, death in the desert, failure to settle in the promised land. Their faith in God made them hopeful and obedient to his call, to step out and believe his promise and to suffer any hardships which might come upon them. (Exodus 19:2-8a)
3. How did the twelve feel when they were asked 'to cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons'? What did they risk - inability, failure, scorn, rejection, being hungry etc? Why did they obey? Trust in Jesus' authority and the desire to give hope to an oppressed people. No doubt they still went fearful of their own inability and of what suffering they might experience but their faith in Jesus made them obedient to his mission.
4. What is Christ calling us to do? Perhaps there is a nagging call to ministry which you have been trying to ignore. 'No, not me', you say, 'I'm too old. It's too risky. People won't like that. I don't have the skills, the time, the means.' Perhaps our congregation is being called to a hope-giving ministry in our town. 'We can't do that. There's not enough of us. It will cost too much. We haven't the time. We don't know how'. What are we afraid of? If possible mention some local need for which the congregation could 'take a risk'.
5. Christ calls us to step out in faith. Jesus showed the apostles that they needed only the minimum of equipment. There would be support in the wider community. The apostles went in faith and did wonders in the name of Christ. We will too if we are prepared to trust in Jesus' promises.