



TOGETHER

For this issue of TOGETHER Revd Peter Bates has prepared the service material.

Increase our faith

Hymn *Morning has broken*
(StF 136, H&P 635, SOF 393)

Prayer

Lord Jesus, you left your place in heaven to come to earth to serve us.
Thank you that you showed us the way to live our life in service to others.
We worship you now as the risen Lord, the one who overcame death and sin.
Thank you that your sacrifice makes a way for us to be forgiven.
We are sorry Lord for the times we have walked by on the other side when we have seen people suffering.
Forgive us Lord for the hurt we cause in the things we do or say.
Thank you for your free and full forgiveness.
Amen

Hymn *May the mind of Christ my Saviour*
(StF 504, H&P 739, SOF 1448)

Readings *Luke 17 v 5 – 10*
2 Timothy 1 v 3 – 12

Hymn *Immortal, invisible God only wise*
(StF 55, H&P 9, SOF 234)

Sermon

The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!" But the apostles already had faith. When they met Jesus for the first time, they realised that there was something special about this man. They perhaps listened to Jesus on a number of occasions or even talked to him. But there came a point in their lives when they had to make a decision about Jesus. Should they follow him or not? It was a huge step; they were leaving their families and their work. They took a step of faith, they were young men and it was a challenge, an adventure. But as time went on the challenges became harder and the constant moving around must have unsettled them.

It became clear from Jesus teaching that this was not just a preaching tour, it was the start of a movement. Jesus was out to change people's understanding of who God is and how we should serve and worship him. Alongside this Jesus was teaching his disciples, he was testing them to help them to grow in faith. The disciples did not know it at

the time but he was going to leave the work to them, and so there was an urgency in his teaching and his work. The disciples were breathless trying to keep up with him. They came to a point where they knew they were lacking, and so they ask Jesus to, "Increase our faith!"

The life that Jesus lived with his disciples was one of faith. They depended on others to feed them, they sometimes slept in the open when they were on a journey. And most important of all was the miracles which Jesus performed. The disciples must have looked on in amazement at the healings that took place. They also must have been impressed with the way Jesus dealt with the religious leaders who posed various questions to him. The disciples learned so much about God the Father from all these things.

The example of service which Jesus gives in Luke chapter 17 is one which the disciples would have understood. It would have been expected of a servant to serve, it was their duty. Jesus was pointing out that the disciples had to serve in the same way, not expecting any form of praise or reward but serving because it was their duty. There were a number of occasions where Jesus had to repeat the lesson in different ways but the message was the same. In one lesson Jesus pointed to the Pharisees who were praised by others, and Jesus commented that they had received their reward on earth so there will be no reward for them in heaven.

If we think about the passage in Luke 17 v 5 – 10, what do we learn from it ourselves? Do we test our motives? We may be serving others but are we doing it for the right reasons? We can easily slip into a situation where we feel aggrieved because nobody showed any appreciation for what we did on Sunday or during the week. We need to make sure that when we do something, when we help someone, it is an expression of our love to God, we do these things because it is a way of delighting God by serving others. It is not out of a sense of duty; it is out of love to God.

When my Mum was in her late seventies and she had mobility issues, she still wanted to do things at church. I tried to comfort by saying, "You have served that church all your life." She responded straight away by saying, "I serve God not the church." She was right to correct my clumsy wording. She genuinely did serve God in the work she did inside the church and outside in the community. But when people annoyed her, and disagreed with her she carried on, she didn't bear grudges because she was there to serve God not to please people.

If we have this attitude our faith will grow because we learn to work with all kinds of people and still show love to them. Too often, Christians have been stunted in their growth because they hold a grudge or they won't talk to a certain person. Jesus had the same problem with his disciples, they had to learn to get along with each other, even serve each other. They had to learn to love, to forgive and share one another's burdens.

One of the ways our faith can grow is through compassion for others. There are a number of miracles which Jesus performed because he had compassion on the individual. He reached out to those in need. It is when we reach out to those in need in our church and in our community that we will see our faith grow, because we will have to depend on God for the resources we need. We will be lifted out of our comfort zone and allow ourselves to be vulnerable, so that God can use us to bring healing and wholeness to people

We may feel as though our faith is as small as a mustard seed but the more we exercise it, the more we will see God at work in our lives and the lives of others. But we have to take that step of faith, not knowing what the consequences will be, and sometimes that might mean failure. But it is better to get out of the boat and sink than stay safely in the boat and never know the extraordinary power of God.

Today, in Methodism we face decline, with churches closing and less members to keep the other churches afloat. Therefore, perhaps we need to try something new. It may not work, and if it doesn't our church may close anyway. But if it does work and we step out into the unknown and try something new we may find God blessing us for our courage and our faith. In the eyes of the world Jesus death on the cross was seen as failure but we know it was the greatest triumph in all the world. Amen

Hymn Holy, holy, holy Lord God Almighty
(StF 11, H&P 7, SOF 183)

Questions

Would we like to have more faith?
How have you used your faith recently?
Do you believe that God tests you so that your faith can grow?
Are there people who you admire because of their strong faith?
What can you learn from them?

Prayer

Lord, we pray for those who suffer today because of the pride of others.
We think of the people of Ukraine and ask that you will protect them.

We bring before those countries that are suffering from extreme weather conditions, places like Pakistan, Cuba, Canada and Florida in America.
We pray that you will keep people safe and that aid will get to those in most need. Amen

Hymn Great is thy faithfulness
(StF 51, H&P 66, SOF 147)

Blessing

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with us, and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, for ever and ever. Amen

Circuit Strategy Group

As you may be aware the Circuit Strategy Group has been set up to envision what our Circuit may need to look like in three or four years' time in order that we may all continue to deepen our faith in Christ, offer that faith to others, and work within our communities for their well-being and transformation.

This, the first in a series of communications, is to keep you abreast of some of the things being discussed and to ask you to pray regularly for the team and the direction of travel.

This time next year we shall have two ministers with pastoral charge of our current nine churches, with the added bonus of Rev. Peter Bates giving 10 hours voluntary work at Balderton. There are many challenges we face (alongside many other mainstream Christian fellowships) – dwindling and ageing congregations, a seeming lack of relevance to communities, and financial difficulties (not helped by the energy crisis and buildings) to name a few. As a Circuit we can sit back and do nothing or we can seek, with God's help, to make some changes to address our stated purposes in paragraph one above.

As a team we will strive to locate good practice around us.

We have committed ourselves to seven two-hour meetings between now and the end of February. Please pray for us and the outcome of those meetings. The next one will look at the crucial step of what we prioritise for discussion and possible action! Please feel free to speak to us about our involvement. If you would like to be involved please be in contact with one of the ministers.

Team: Andrew Ayre, Rev. Peter Bates, Ruby Beech, Rev. Nathan Falla, Rev. Peter Hibberts, Ann Lyne, Rev. Barrie Morley, Carolyn Suter, Andrew Trowbridge, David Watson, Jan Wright