

***When faith doesn't work as it should!***

Jeremiah 11<sup>18-20</sup>; Psalm 54; James 3<sup>13-43,7-98a</sup>; Mark 9<sup>30-37</sup>

*To you I have committed my cause.  
[Jeremiah 20<sup>20</sup>]*

We have spent a lot of time establishing the foundation on which we build together as a Church - it's all about Jesus! This is what Mark is telling us and makes sense.

We have also taken time to explore the demands of being a disciple - when you pick up your cross you accept that the universe isn't all about you but that God has the first call on who we are and has the right to say what we can and what we cannot to.

All of this is good and an essential foundation for our own faith and our live together as a Christian community, a Church.

We are not a social club nor a friendship group, but a Church - worshippers of God and followers of Jesus!

Neither are we just a Church, but we are a Parish Church where everyone belongs and we take seriously our duty to serve those around us in Christ's name, praying that in that service they will learn something about the love of God.

But being a Christian isn't always straightforward and following Jesus can feel a bit like carrying a cross! It can feel as if faith isn't doing its job and that faith doesn't result in the straightforward life that it 'should'.

- ✦ The Psalm is written whilst David, God's anointed King, is being pursued by the incumbent king, Saul. He accepts that God has chosen him and that he will be king, but this Psalm is written when David is hiding amongst the Ziphites and they go and tell Saul where he is. I am confident that David has the faith that God will vindicate him, but also that he would rather not be in this situation.
- ✦ The Epistle to James records disputes amongst Christian people - the result of people wanting things to go their own way and of their cravings. The advice is clear - resist the devil and he will get lost and draw near to God and he will be with you. Sometime even Christians can appear more human than divine and simply have to submit to God.
- ✦ The Gospel has Jesus noting that the disciples are falling out amongst themselves and reminds them that they have to be like servants and children (n.b. in the

context of the 1st Century children had no rights or status and were legally and socially insignificant).

- ✦ We will spend a few moments looking at the prophecy of Jeremiah (aware that we don't focus as much on the Old Testament as we might). The text records the first of Jeremiah's spiritual crises and it is clear that this causes him a great deal of spiritual agonising. He has been extolling the virtues of the revival of true faith under King Josiah and moving the focus of worship in Israel to Jerusalem. The problem is that he is living in Anathoth, a major religious centre, and the move towards the reforms of Josiah and the move to Jerusalem didn't bode well for the town in which he lived. It is clear that Jeremiah is the subject of a plot to kill him in which his family, friends, and neighbours were involved. He didn't know anything about it until God told him what was going on. As was common at the time, Jeremiah is concerned because he is unmarried and has no children and so if he dies all that he is would come to an abrupt end - his life would be pointless. We are allowed into his conversation with God and Jeremiah confesses that God knows all about the strength of his feeling - but he leaves the response in God's hands!

So, how do we respond when faith doesn't work as it should?

Two things!

We hold onto the fact that God has promised that he will work things out for us and that we don't have to make everything OK for ourselves or by ourselves. Our past, present and future are known to God and forgiven by God. If we can look back and detect God's hand guiding and supporting then we can be confident that this same support is with us now and will be into the future.

We go on living as Christians in our priorities, our morals and our relationships - we aren't Buddhists looking to achieve a state when we have no attachments to anything and no cravings, but we are Christians people passionate about God, craving his love and living out his kingdom.

*A man fell off a cliff but managed to grab hold of a branch on his way down. He hung there and shouted to the top, 'Is anybody there?' 'Yes!' came the reply. 'God is up here!' 'Can you help me, God?' 'Yes! Let go of the branch!' There was a pause and then, 'Is there anybody else up there....?'*

Faith, especially when it is difficult, is about letting go and letting God.