

Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost (Ordinary 26)

26-09-2021

St Cuthbert's Anglican Church – Tweed Heads

Esther 7:1-6,9-10; 9:20-22      Esther saves her people by petitioning the King

Psalms 124      Thanking God for Deliverance

James 5: 12-20      Prayer of Faith

Mark 9: 38-50      Rewards for Faithfulness to God  
Beware of temptation to sin

### Introduction

Today, I would like to look at how we as Christians, are called to be faithful to God.

Firstly, I would like to look at the call of Jesus for Christians to be faithful. And secondly, I would like to look at what our bible readings for today tell us about being faithful to God, and how these examples might help us to be faithful to God in our lives.

### Christian Faithfulness

So firstly, let us look at Christian faithfulness.

What does it mean to be faithful to God?

It might include behaving in a certain way, but it's not just about that. It might be about believing certain things about God, but it's not just about that.

Jesus calls disciples to follow him.

When Jesus came in human form, his first words recorded in Mark's gospel are, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news." (Mark 1:15)

The second words Jesus speaks when he approaches Simon (Peter) and Andrew are, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people." (Mark 1:17)

It is pretty clear that Jesus believed he was starting something. To repent means to turn your life around, so Jesus was calling his followers to turn their lives around. In Jesus, a new phase in God's plans for the world had begun, in fulfilment of God's call to Abram in Genesis 12, that "all the families of the

earth shall be blessed.” And to accomplish his plans for creation, God uses us, the human beings he created.

God’s plans for the world are Good, and we are called to take our part.

But how does this fit with the society in which we live?

Well, we are currently living in a time period sometimes referred to as Post-Modernity. This may be an oversimplification, but many believe that there are no ultimate truths and we can pick and chose what we like in life. If something makes you feel good, then do it. If there’s something that doesn’t really interest you then don’t worry about it.

This doesn’t fit with what Jesus called his followers into. Jesus expected those who would follow him to give over their entire lives to him. So, to be a faithful Christian should mean that we will be different to those around us who aren’t, but in a good way.

Let us now look at today’s Bible readings, and how they might help us in seeking to be faithful to God.

### Esther

In the reading from Esther today we see how Esther showed courage in her faithfulness to God. Even though she was the queen, it took courage to go before the king and put a request to him. Haman had evil intentions against the whole of the people of Israel, and Esther was standing up for God’s people. Being faithful to God may require courage from us, in standing up against injustice.

### Psalm 124

In psalm 124 we hear the psalmist thanking God for protection. Being faithful to God requires us to be thankful for God’s blessings to us.

### James

In today’s reading from the letter of James we hear how being diligent in prayer is required, as part of being faithful to God. Whether we are cheerful or whether we are suffering we are called to prayer. We are called to pray for healing and for forgiveness.

As Christians we are in a relationship with God, and prayer is the way we communicate within the relationship.

## Mark

In the first part of our reading from Mark's gospel today, we hear of being rewarded for being faithful to God. Whoever gives a cup of water to those following Jesus will not lose their reward.

We then have a big warning. Jesus says that if little ones who believe in him are hindered in their faith, it will not be well for those who hinder them. We need to make sure we are not providing stumbling blocks for others. In fact, being faithful to God, will mean we are called to help others be faithful to God.

As the reading continues, Jesus uses very evocative language to warn his followers about temptations that might draw us away from remaining faithful to God. I don't think anyone thought Jesus was literally telling his disciples to cut off their own hands or feet, or pull out their own eyes, but he was making it very clear that there are big challenges before us if we wish to remain faithful to God.

Just as there were temptations for Jesus' followers 2000 years ago, there are temptations for us now. We need to be aware of the things in our lives that hinder our own faithfulness to God. I know one of the things I need to work on is too much TV. There will be different, and greater or smaller temptations that each of us face. Things that hold us back from prayer, things that hold us back from reading the scriptures, and spending time praising and worshipping God together. In and of themselves they might not be particularly bad things, but if they hold us back from being faithful to God, then we need to find ways of dealing with our temptations.

## Conclusion

Being faithful to God is not automatic. It requires effort on our part.

Of course, we know we can't earn our way into heaven by being faithful. We are saved by grace, through placing our faith in what Jesus has done for us.

But if we do accept what Jesus has done for us, then we will want to love God, and God will give us,  
firstly, the desire to be faithful,  
and secondly, the will to remain faithful.

My prayer today is that we will be encouraged and enabled to continue to be faithful to God.

Salt is good; but if salt has lost its saltiness, how can it be seasoned? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another.