

Sunday 14th August 2022

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God is love, let us adore God by sharing God's love.
God is ever present, around us and within us,
we worship together in God.

Readings Hebrews 11:1-3 & 8-16 (JB Phillips translation [read here](#))
Luke 12:32-40

Song Magical Mystery Tour – The Beatles ([Listen here](#))

Reflection

Have you ever been on a mystery tour? Committed yourself to getting into a car or onto a coach with no idea of where you would end up. Our reading from Hebrews reminds us that Abraham and Sarah went on a magical mystery tour, leaving behind what they knew and setting off into the unknown. The writer of Hebrews is asking his readers to consider the role of faith in their lives following the Jesus Way.

Theologian, Harry Emerson Fosdick, wrote in his exploration of faith that it is an inevitable part of life. If we could live without faith, then life would be little more than a curious interest. Fosdick suggests that as we deal not simply with past and present, we must believe in the possibilities of the future and thus we must have faith. We cannot live without faith because we live in a universe, the complete explanation of which is beyond us, so when we think of the universe we are acting in faith. He points to the Tennyson Poem The Ancient Sage, in which faith is personified with a passion for life –

Thou canst not prove the Nameless, O my son,
nor canst thou prove the world thou movest in.
Thou canst not prove that thou art body alone,
nor canst thou prove that thou art spirit alone,
nor canst thou prove that thou art both in one:
Thou canst not prove thou art immortal, no
nor yet that thou art mortal—nay my son,
thou canst not prove that I, who speak with thee,
am not thyself in converse with thyself.
For nothing worthy proving can be proven,
nor yet disproven: wherefore thou be wise,
cleave ever to the sunnier side of doubt,
and cling to Faith beyond the forms of Faith.
She reels not in the storm of warring words,
she brightens at the clash of 'Yes' and 'No',
she sees the Best that glimmers thro' the Worst,
she feels the Sun is hid but for a night,
she spies the summer thro' the winter bud,
she tastes the fruit before the blossom falls,
she hears the lark within the songless egg,
she finds the fountain where they wail'd 'Mirage'!

To live without faith is to give up on life for life is a continuous adventure into the unknown, but faith takes courage and patience.

More recently theologian Paul Tillich wrote that faith is a state of being ultimately concerned, of being gripped and driven by something that we are convinced is of fundamental importance, and which demands our whole-hearted commitment. I constantly read of charities set up by people who are ultimately concerned, people whose own life experience has revealed a need and who feel

driven to meet that need for others – Book Aid International who work with publishers to provide new books to people around the world, Free my Meal who connect cooks with surplus meals with those who need a meal, and a young man who gave up his hairdressing job and now travels the world cutting the hair of homeless people.

People across the globe have faith as a bedrock of their religion but does that faith translate into being ultimately concerned. An atheist is not someone who doesn't believe in a particular definition of God, an atheist is someone who denies that there is any ultimate concern, someone who believes life is entirely meaningless. Einstein once said that the most beautiful thing we experience is the mysterious for it is the source of all true art and science. We are all embraced within the mystery that is creation and we become aware of that mystery in occasional glimpses that take us deeper and reveal something that inspires us, and some say warms our souls:

- The sense of our tininess when we gaze into the starry night sky
- Watching a new-born lamb struggle to its feet for the first time
- Smelling the top of a baby's head
- Listening to a blackbird in full song
- Getting lost in a favourite piece of music
- Cuddling with a loved one without the need for words

It is in the sense of being embraced by the mystery of creation that we are inspired to ultimate concern. Mystery is gracious and good. I believe that God is love and I believe that creation is God therefore creation is love and the universe is an inherently friendly place. Now, we know that terrible things happen in creation, but the strength of our humanity and the courage of our faith mean we find ways through the pain. We believe God is present in creation, so God is present in the pain and in our wrestling with the pain. We are changed by the experience and out of the experience we become more aware, and this inspires our faith, our ultimate concern.

Faith leads us to desire something better, we can give up and stay the same, we can even return to what was, but both of this indicate a loss of faith. Faith is not an attitude of mind that believes in a gospel written a long time ago about events which took place in the past, faith is a way of living which reflects an ultimate concern for a better world glimpsed in moments of mystery within the here and now.

Story – The chief's three sons.

Once there was a Native American chief who was nearing the end of his life. He had three sons and even though he had tried many times, he was not able to decide which of his sons should succeed him as chief.

In a last attempt one day, he gathered his sons together and said to them, 'Do you see that mountain in the distance? I want you to journey to that mountain, climb to its summit and bring back the thing you think will be most helpful in leading our people.' The sons departed.

After several days, the first son returned with a load of flint stones, used to make arrow tips and spear points. He told his father, 'Our people will never live in fear of their enemies. I know where there is a mound of flint.'

The second son climbed to the top of the mountain, and on the way found forests rich with wood for making fires. When he returned, he said to his father, 'Our people will never be cold in winter. I know where wood can be found in abundance to keep them warm and to cook their food.'

The third son returned late and empty-handed. He stated, 'When I got to the summit, I found nothing worth bringing back. I searched everywhere, but the top of the mountain was barren rock and useless. Then I looked out towards the horizon, far into the distance. I was astonished to see new land filled with forests and meadows, mountains and valleys, fish and animals - a land of

great beauty and great peace. I brought nothing back, for the land was still far off and I did not have time to travel there. One day I would love to go there; I delayed coming back because I found it difficult to return after seeing the beauty of that land.'

The old chief's eyes blazed. He grasped his third son in his arms, proclaiming that he would succeed him as the new chief. He thought to himself, 'The other sons brought back worthy things, necessary things. But my third son has a vision. He has seen a better land, the promised land, and he burns with the desire to go there.'

Traditional, source unknown.

We are the people of God, we profess a belief in the kingdom and we are called to make that our ultimate concern. The message of Jesus compels us to love our neighbour and our neighbour is anyone in need. Our mission is not to have nice buildings in which to worship God and yet if an alien landed in our church meetings, I sometimes worry that is the conclusion to which they would come, we spend too much time discussing buildings and finance and not enough time sharing our ultimate concern, the coming of the kingdom. Our reading from Luke is speaking to gentile Christians in danger of being trapped by ritual and worried by the destruction of the temple and what do they hear, 'do not be afraid'. Have courage and have vision for the future. If we have a building then it should be the focus of our outreach, and that is more than being a nice building to hire. Luke calls his readers to be ready, to look to the future, not dwell in the past.

Many of us are in the midst of conversations about the future, we are looking at setting off for a new land. Are we as ready as Abraham to leave things and buildings behind, to travel to this new land and is ultimate concern for the message of love our driving force? We are all relatively small churches but think what we might achieve together if we have faith to journey forward. It is a mystery tour, but faith is about mystery, we cannot be certain of the outcome, but we can hope, and staying as we are is not travelling with God and maybe it is not faith.