



Vision studies – week 5

Growing in Faith

w/c 9 February 2020

"Faith is taking the first step even when you don't see the whole staircase." (Martin Luther King, Jr.)

Our next three studies look at aspects of growth: this week, Faith, with Hope and Love in the coming weeks. Start by reflecting on this section of our overall vision, *"Secondly, we give expression to our relationship with God by growing as followers of Jesus. We do that by learning to love more deeply his church, the body of believers he has brought together; by growing in our trust and by becoming his agents of hope."*

Faith and trust are inextricably linked and in thinking through them I am reminded of the now famous poem by Minnie Louise Haskins quoted by George VI in his Christmas message of 1939:

And I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year:

"Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown."

And he replied: "Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the Hand of God.

That shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way."

For the King in 1939, 'darkness' was likely the coming horrors of war. What is it for us today? Why do think the reply begins with "Go"?

Read Proverbs 3:1-12

Why do think the writer links love and faithfulness together in the way they do in verse three?

What danger is there of moving away from faith to an almost contractual form of religion if we overly focus on verses nine and ten? How do we avoid descending into some form of prosperity gospel?

The writer here warns against being *"wise in your own eyes"* though elsewhere in Proverbs there are many injunctions to *"be wise"*. What does wise living look like in the 21st century? How might you describe true wisdom to a friend who has no understanding of Christianity?

Read Hebrews 11:1-8 and 36-40

What is the difference between belief and faith? Why is faith so important for the Christian? Paul Tillich wrote that, *"Doubt is not the opposite of faith; it is one element of faith."* How does this compare with the epistle writer's thoughts of sureness and certainty at the start of this passage?

Perhaps the most important verse in this chapter is actually the opening of the following one – *"Therefore, ... let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith."* A key aspect is that it's our race we are to run, not that run by someone in the past or anyone else around us. Where do you feel you are being called to run? Equally, as we seek to 'embody' the vision for our church, where do we see *"the race marked out for us"* taking St James?

We are the community of those whose gaze is fixed on Jesus – he alone is our centre. Discuss how defining the church this way rather than requiring adherence to a statement of belief or set of right behaviours can change the way we see those around us.

"Be faithful in small things because it is in them that your strength lies." (Mother Teresa)