**Sermon on faith Sunday 20th January 2019**

1 Corinthians 12:1-11

John 2: 1-11

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable to you, Lord Jesus.

The phrase that keeps coming back to me this week is: Life happens. We plan everything beautifully and then life happens, changing our thoughts and, sometimes, our direction and priorities.

We have just sung Cornerstone which says “my hope is built on nothing less than Jesus blood and righteousness. … Christ alone, cornerstone, weak made strong in the Saviour’s love, through the storm, he is Lord. Lord of all”.

I would like you all to write on a post-it-note how long you have had any sort of faith in God or been a Christian and bring them up and put them on our mountain.

MUSIC – walk by faith and not by sight – short

The first miracle of the wedding at Cana is only recorded in John’s gospel where it is called the first sign, it is written to point the reader to God’s revelation in Jesus. The host runs out of wine. In the ancient Near East it was possible to take legal action against someone if they failed to provide the appropriate wedding gift so running out of wine could have been a financial catastrophe as well as a social disaster, making Jesus gift far more important than our culture might recognise. It was the start of Jesus ministry, and his mission to bring people to faith. Mary is not named, she is referred to as the mother of Jesus and I realised something that I had not consciously noticed before, she does not actually ask Jesus to act. She simply tells him that “they have no wine”. She expected that Jesus would respond, but she did not specifically ask him to do anything. She had faith that Jesus would respond to her comment, but she did not tell him how to respond. It led me to think about:

When we pray, do we tell God how we want Him to respond, rather than giving Him the situation and asking Him to respond to it? I know that when I pray it is easy for me to think that I can see the answer to the problem, and then to pray to God about the problem, asking that He solves it in my way. I hope that I am learning how futile that approach is. God so often answers prayer, but not in the way that we expected. In my experience God’s answer is always infinitely better than the solution that I provided!

Jesus responds to Mary by reminding her that He has a purpose in His life (my hour is not yet come) before his mother tells the servants to “do whatever he tells you”. There is no explanation from Jesus or his mother about what is going to happen, his mother has faith that Jesus will solve the problem. Not only did Jesus turn the water into wine, He did so spectacularly. Each of the water pots was about 20 gallons. Jesus instructs them to refill the jars and water becomes wine, not just enough wine to solve the problem, but an abundant supply of wine, about 640 bottles of wine in today’s measures. This was not just any wine, but the best wine. When we give our challenges to Jesus, he does not always answer our prayers in our way, but His way blesses abundantly and richly.

I think that we can all have times in our life when something happens which tests our faith. My grandmother was firm believer until my mother, an only child, died of cancer at the age of 36. Life happened and by her own admission my grandmother was so angry with God that she did not go to church for many years afterwards. Her faith did withstand that because she eventually returned to church and her faith. I think we all have times in our lives which test our faith, and we are tempted to throw the baby out with the bath water and turn our backs on God. You are not alone if you have ever felt like that. However, I look around our church and I see faith in lorry loads. Sometimes it takes others to tell us that we are more faithful than we think.

Faith is described in Hebrews 11:1 as “the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen”.

This definitely describes the mother of Jesus approach to the problem of the wine running out.

Ephesians 2:8 says “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God.”

In our Corinthians reading, again a very familiar reading, we have Paul talking to the Corinthian church about spiritual gifts. The Corinthian church thought that they had special status because of the spiritual gifts that had been given to them, particularly in relation to the gift of tongues. Paul points out in verses 4-7 that there are “varieties of gifts but the same Spirit; there are varieties of services but the same Lord; varieties of activities but the same God activates all of them in everyone”.

I look around this church and I see men and women of great faith. Sometimes **we** don’t feel as if we have great faith, most of us have doubts and struggles with life and faith at some point in our lives. Faith is not something that we can measure, and it is given to us to us through the Holy Spirit, v8-9 of our Corinthian reading says “to one is given … to another faith by the same Spirit”. Faith goes alongside wisdom, knowledge, healing, working of miracles, prophecy, discernment of spirits, various kinds of tongues and the interpretation of tongues. None of these gifts is any more or less valuable than another, including faith.

If we look at our mountain of faith, we can see that we have xxx years of faith between us, and we all know that phrase “stronger together”. When we are struggling with our faith then that is exactly the time when we should be joining together in worship with others of faith. Between us we have a mountain of faith, and whether you contribute one year or 50 years of faith to that, you are part of that mountain of faith that makes up St. Martin’s Church. Our Corinthians reading reminds us in verse 7 that “to each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good”. We are not given our faith for ourselves, but for the common good, the good of everyone. The Greek word means what is advantageous or helpful for everyone. If we keep our faith to ourselves then it is not being used as God intended.

There is something else that speaks indirectly of the faith of our church, and that is the love shown by those in the church. This morning’s reading is followed by 1 Corinthians 13 which is all about love, and in verse 13 it says “faith, hope and love abide, these three: and the greatest of these is love.” If you want to see the faith of the church, just look at the love in it. It is shown through every contribution that everyone makes to the lives of each other and to the life of the church, that phone call, that hug, cleaning the toilets, making the coffee, arranging the flowers, singing in the worship group, being churchwarden, prayer, doing the newsletter, I could go on and on. All the ways in which people serve God and all the activities of the church are because of the gift of faith which is given by God through the Holy Spirit.

So whether your faith is new or longstanding, remember that it is a gift from God to be shared.

Amen