

God's Faithfulness – New Year Sermon 4th January 2015

Reading: Psalm 89:1-18

- ¹ I will sing of the LORD's great love forever; with my mouth I will make your faithfulness known through all generations.
- ² I will declare that your love stands firm forever, that you have established your faithfulness in heaven itself.
- ³ You said, "I have made a covenant with my chosen one, I have sworn to David my servant, ⁴ 'I will establish your line forever and make your throne firm through all generations.'"
- ⁵ The heavens praise your wonders, LORD, your faithfulness too, in the assembly of the holy ones.
- ⁶ For who in the skies above can compare with the LORD? Who is like the LORD among the heavenly beings?
- ⁷ In the council of the holy ones God is greatly feared; he is more awesome than all who surround him.
- ⁸ Who is like you, LORD God Almighty? You, LORD, are mighty, and your faithfulness surrounds you.
- ⁹ You rule over the surging sea; when its waves mount up, you still them.
- ¹⁰ You crushed Rahab like one of the slain; with your strong arm you scattered your enemies.
- ¹¹ The heavens are yours, and yours also the earth; you founded the world and all that is in it.
- ¹² You created the north and the south; Tabor and Hermon sing for joy at your name.
- ¹³ Your arm is endowed with power; your hand is strong, your right hand exalted.
- ¹⁴ Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; love and faithfulness go before you.
- ¹⁵ Blessed are those who have learned to acclaim you, who walk in the light of your presence, LORD. ¹⁶ They rejoice in your name all day long; they celebrate your righteousness.
- ¹⁷ For you are their glory and strength, and by your favour you exalt our horn. ¹⁸ Indeed, our shield belongs to the LORD, our king to the Holy One of Israel.

Introduction

This morning I would like to think about God's Faithfulness

- It seems an ideal topic for the first Sunday of the New Year
- We can look back over 2014 and remind ourselves of God's faithfulness to us
- In the new building
- In bringing us through all the challenges of the year.

We can also look forward to 2015

- Look to the challenges ahead and remind ourselves to trust our faithful God
- Whatever we hope for
- Whatever our fears for the future
- We have a faithful God who will be with us no matter what the year may bring.

It seems to me that this year's Motto Text perfectly expresses this

- A desire to speak out
- To express gratitude for the past
- and trust for the future

I will sing of the Lord's great love for ever; with my mouth I will make your faithfulness known through all generations (Psalm 89:1)

This morning I wanted to share three thoughts on this verse

- Firstly God's Love and faithfulness
- Secondly our response in worship and witness
- And finally All generations

God's Love and Faithfulness

We know God is love

- We know he is faithful and will keep all his promises to us
- This is the foundation of everything we say and do
- If God is not loving and faithful then we might as well pack up and go home.
- Because love is the motivation for the gospel
- Trust in God's faithfulness is what keeps us going in our walk of faith.
- Paul affirms his trust in God's faithfulness when, in the face of persecution, he says *"I know whom I have believed and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day"* (2 Tim 1:12)

Throughout the bible we learn of God's faithfulness

- Balaam tells Barak in Numbers 23:19 *"God is not a man that he should lie, nor a son of man that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and then not fulfil?"*
- Paul is more direct when he tells the Thessalonians *"The one who calls you is faithful, he will do it"* (1 Thess. 5:24)

We could talk for a long time about God's faithfulness

- If I asked, I'm sure many of you could share stories of God's faithfulness to you
- And it is good, at such times as these to look at God and be grateful
- To remind ourselves of the times He has helped us, comforted us, encouraged and strengthened us.
- To remember the times we have struggled and God has felt distant.
- Yet looking back we see he was with us all the time.
- Like the footprints poem.

But this is only one side of understanding God's faithfulness

- We look at life and can see God working his purposes out as the hymn puts it.
- God's love and faithfulness should not only be the foundation of everything we believe and do.
- It should also be the lens through which we seek to understand this world.
- We can find God in our experiences of life,
- And praise Him that we can
- But also we can seek to understand life through the knowledge of God.

We all have an idea of what life is all about.

- An underlying Philosophy of life
- It is how we explain our experiences and make sense of the world.
- It is this that explains our reactions to things that happen.
- It is what we base our morality, our sense of right and wrong.
- How we respond to and how we treat others.

What I am saying is that our whole understanding of life should be based on the knowledge of God's faithfulness and love.

- If, for example, we start with our problems and try to fit God's love to them
- We start with being fearful and anxious
- And then look for comfort by reminding ourselves of God's faithful love.
- But we could start thinking – "everything's going wrong"
- "Maybe I've sinned,"
- "Maybe I'm slow at learning God's lesson"
- Is this really how we should be?

Surely we should start with God's faithful love

- And seek to understand our problems in the light of that.
- We begin with the truth of God's faithfulness.
- Then our problems are seen as opportunities to grow in Him

This is what James is talking about in his letter

"Considerate pure joy, my brothers whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything."

This is not easy.

- I wish I could do it more
- But we see it throughout the bible
- It always starts with God
- And everything else fits around Him.

The prophet Habbakuk lived in terrible times

- The whole nation was under threat from the neighbouring Babylonian superpower
- Habbakuk begins his prophesy with his complaint to God
- Hab. 1:2-4

How long, Lord, must I call for help, but you do not listen?

Or cry out to you, "Violence!" but you do not save?

3 Why do you make me look at injustice? Why do you tolerate wrongdoing?

Destruction and violence are before me; there is strife, and conflict abounds.

4 Therefore the law is paralyzed, and justice never prevails.

The wicked hem in the righteous, so that justice is perverted.

Gods reply is – the Babylonians will come and your nation will be destroyed.

- Habbakuk is dismayed
- "You are supposed to be faithful" he says "Yet you are doing nothing"
- God replies again "Evil will continue to flourish but the Babylonians will also suffer the same fate they visit on others."
- Habbakuk then reminds himself of God's greatness
- And ends with a wonderful psalm of trust
- Habbakuk 3:17-19

Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines,

though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food,

though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls,

¹⁸ yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Saviour.

¹⁹ The Sovereign LORD is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to tread on the heights.

Our response – Worship and Witness

This brings us to our response to God's love and faithfulness.

- Our motto text tells us
I will sing of the Lord's great love for ever; with my mouth I will make your faithfulness known through all generations (Psalm 89:1)

This is worship - We will sing of God's great love

- And witness - With our mouths we will make his faithfulness known
- Worship is telling God how wonderful he is
- Whether by song, word or deed.
- It is giving ourselves to God
- Acknowledging Him as Lord.

Romans 12:1-2

"Therefore, I urge you brothers (and sisters), in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will."

Witness is telling others

- Speaking out about God's faithful love.
- Sharing our faith and experiences of God.

- Jesus' last words to his disciples before he ascended to heaven were
"You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth"

These words are both a challenge and an encouragement

- A challenge to speak out
- And encouragement that we will have power from the Holy Spirit to do so.
- And what we have to share is 'Good News'
- And we can be confident in its power, truth and effectiveness
- Because it is based on a God who is loving and faithful in all he does

We may be told faith is a personal matter

- And we should keep it to ourselves.
- But we "no longer conform to the pattern of this world"
- Paul tells the young Timothy
"Do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord" (2 Tim 1:8)
- And goes on to tell him to have confidence in the gospel he has been taught
"What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching with faith and love in Christ Jesus. Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you – guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us." (2 Tim 1:13)

For all Generations

Finally I want to think about the phrase 'for all generations'

- This could mean through all the years
- God's faithfulness lasts forever
- It could mean it is for all ages
- Children, youths, young Adults, middle age, seniors
 - We should witness to all ages
 - We should share God's love with all ages.

But also people of all ages can, and should, worship God

- Whatever age we are we are all part of the church's witness to God's love and faithfulness
- Whatever our education, background or abilities
- We all have something to give
- Something to share in worship and witness

We should be confident and inspired to find how to use our unique abilities for God

- We should appreciate the gifts of others
- And together we can worship and witness to God's love and faithfulness

I want to finish with more of Romans 12

- Verses 3-18

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. ² Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.
Humble Service in the Body of Christ

³ *For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. ⁴ For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, ⁵ so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. ⁶ We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your^[a] faith; ⁷ if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; ⁸ if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.*

Love in Action

⁹ *Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. ¹⁰ Be devoted to one another in love. Honour one another above yourselves. ¹¹ Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervour, serving the Lord. ¹² Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. ¹³ Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.*

¹⁴ *Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. ¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. ¹⁶ Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position.^[c] Do not be conceited.*

¹⁷ *Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. ¹⁸ If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.*

Amen