

sermon notes May 3

### **Hebrews 13: 'The security of knowing Jesus'**

**One of my general concerns about many committed Christians is that they rate themselves so poorly. They intently read testimonies of those called by God to sacrificial lives and then beat themselves up that they aren't doing more. Alongside, the feeling which was prevalent until recently that the Christian faith was fighting a losing battle was the sense that we were living on the glories of the past. Many of those who have been believers for many years spoke of it as if the Holy Spirit was no longer at work, had in effect, left the building. I would say that a desire to serve God is an absolute essential for living for Jesus alongside a willingness to do whatever He calls us to do, and this will be acts of service for sure, in all its shapes and forms. I recall when Stephen was minister here and Fi and I were elders. He got us to attend training sessions on a Sunday evening on how to lead church services and then he got us to put that into practice. I for one was not happy. I hadn't signed up to be pushed out of my comfort zone and that was definitely talking to large groups. I was happy leading youth group and house groups, but no more. And yet, I am so grateful for those early pushes which gradually gave me the sense that I could preach and lead services. How about you? What is God talking to you about? This is the last of our studies in the letter to the Hebrews. It is the final word of the author after the great teaching of the earlier chapters. This week, we learn how it is to live out our faith. What does it look like? How does it feel? What changes are essential in us for our discipleship to be full on?**

**Any person who looks into how the world is changing will be tempted to take fright. We know that circumstances in our own life can change overnight and we may have concerns about leaders and governments who seem intent on war. When we look back as a Western European we can see that the world was generally governed more securely, in the last decades, seeking the benefit of many rather than the few. However, we can say and know by our experience that Jesus does not change: all the things-such as bank**

managers, doctors, undertakers and owners of nursing homes-may change but Jesus has always been trustworthy and offers rock-like support, He never fails. When we consider our present and future He doesn't lie to us. He told His followers that following after Him would be difficult and that suffering would be involved. In the Gospel of Matthew it is recorded that Jesus told His disciples: "If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross and follow me." He told anyone who declared that they would follow Him wherever He led that they should think carefully before committing their lives to Him. In the Gospel of Luke it is recorded that Jesus stated: "If you do not carry your own cross and follow me, you cannot be my disciple." I say to you this morning, that if you are undecided about following Jesus, think carefully. Talk to believers who have committed themselves to Him, read historical accounts of His followers, ask tough questions. One of the reasons there aren't more Christians is that many consider it but determine that it is not for them. You may think that you can follow Jesus as well as enjoying life in all its forms and fancies. God is patient but gradually He will call you to follow Him exclusively-no other gods but Him; Talk about young woman in Kolkata with images of Ganesh rivalling those of Jesus on her walls--nothing that you treat with more reverence than Him, not even the good things-family, spouse, ambition, a desire for a climate-friendly equable world. Taken to an extreme these can all cause issues with our discipleship.

So, how do we grow in our faith? What are the signs that this is happening?

1. Acting in love. Increasingly, the love that the Holy Spirit pours out into our hearts cause us to act in love, not just feel. Generally, God increases the call for us to love everyone with our whole hearts-firstly those we get on with, then those who are more challenging and then those with seemingly nothing to give in return-the naked, the homeless, the prisoner, the abused, the refugee. When I hear of fellow Christians getting involved in those situations I note the hand of God at work.

**2. Increasing freedom from anxiety. Naturally, most of us are anxious. I work on the maxim that in each married couple there is one who shows their anxieties which then means that the other can appear relaxed and calm. We are told that in the Bible God says 365 times not to worry and sometimes this is used to make out that we are bad Christians if we worry. Remind yourself of the great heroes of the Old Testament, such as Elijah, Moses, Abraham, Gideon, Jonah-these were men who got anxious! Elijah ran for his life from the reigning Queen and showed suicidal tendencies; Moses repeatedly told God that he had no voice for public speaking; Abraham was so worried about insecurity in a foreign land that he told everyone that his wife Sarah was his sister; Gideon was so scared of Midian incursions that he was hiding his produce when the Angel appeared to him; Jonah chose to be thrown overboard in preference to obeying God. However, as the disciples learned, trust in Jesus gradually replaces anxiety. If He has been with you when you are rock-bottom before, surely you can trust Him fully now! Our contentment becomes rooted in God's presence; we can assert that God is enough!**

**3. As the writer assesses: 'Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever.' Jesus does not change, He does not let us down, He doesn't deceive us or overload us. People who were once faithful Christians talk to me about being let down by the church or by other Christians. I get it, would that it never happened, but we are not to ultimately trust in another human's goodness but in Jesus Christ.**

**4. When we find our foundation fully in Him. Worship becomes a way of life. Now I mean not just singing, although that is often a brilliant way to sing out our love for the Son of God. True worship involves: praise with our lips; kindness with our hands; generosity with our resources and service throughout our lives. The be all and end all of worship is not found in feeling good at some lively piece of Christian music. There are plenty of tourist Christians in the world who move from church to church depending on the qualities of the worship band or the speaker. Paul makes it clear: 'We are God's masterpiece, He has created us anew in Christ Jesus so we**

**can do the good things He planned for us long ago.' Are you prepared to commit to this fellowship for as long as you live in this community, when it goes through difficult times as well as in the good times? I am looking for those who will give their time and energy, gifts and heartfelt love in the service of the King as the Holy Spirit moves without borders in this community. He and I need those who are sensitive, have listening ears and are confident to speak the words He gives them to bring life and light, hope and joy to those in the dark.**

**5. This week I urge you to reflect each day: Who can I love more intentionally? What fear can I replace with trust? How can I offer praise through action?**

**Because faith becomes real when it becomes visible. I would like to end by echoing the apostle Paul's words to the fellowship in Philippi: 'I love you and long to see you, my dear friends, for you are my joy and the crown I receive for my work.' AMEN**