

- (Service included communion)

What is Faith?

- What is faith?
 - it seems such an obvious question! So fundamental!
 - and yet one we perhaps rarely ask....
 - what is it that is at the heart of "our (Christian) faith"?
 - what do we mean when we say we have faith?
- The verses we read were selected as representative of the whole section of Hebrews they were taken from:
 - a section that is about faith
 - including the famous "by faith" chapter 11
- And those verses start back at the beginning as far as faith is concerned:
 - look with me at 10:19-25, the first paragraph we read
 - its about where faith begins, our first response to Jesus
 - the language is of the Temple, and what is pictured is our entering into the Holy Place in the Temple, where God is, through or because of Jesus and his death (hence blood)
 - how does that happen?
 - by faith - by us hearing God's word that says this is the only to come, and acting on that belief
 - faith, then, is simply our decision to respond to God's word
- And do you see what happens:
 - God speaks, I respond, and what flows then is a growing relationship with God - "let us draw near to God..." (v.22)
 - and the sign of the inward reality that is faith is the obedience to that word of God
- It may be accompanied by feelings - or it may not!
 - but whether we feel anything, as we exercise faith, it crosses the gulf between our humanity and eternity
 - see 11:1 - "faith is being sure of..." - certainty that God has spoken, there is a future unseen hope, a reality rooted in eternity beyond our human experience, and so acting on that certainty - this is faith!

How can I get more?

- But there's more here...
- The faith spoken of is not a static thing, not something we only exercise when we "come to faith", become Christians, place our trust for the first time in Jesus
 - no, the faith spoken of here is something that is growing, is applied to new situations, that can be strong, assured, certain
 - its just the same as the disciples asked of Jesus, "Increase our faith!" (Luke 17:5)
- Strong faith is faith that continues to respond to the Word of God in the absence of outward encouragement
 - that speaks to others of Jesus even when those folk don't respond to the good news
 - that clings to God, honouring him as good, even in the face of suffering
 - that still clings to the hope of Christ's return, even though he's not shown up in the last 2000 years
 - that continues to say "God has spoken, and so I will..." even when it is hard

Scripture is full of examples of strong faith

- not least the catalogue in Hebrews 11!!
- these are witnesses to us of strong faith - they've exercised and experienced

Hebrews 10:19-12:13 **The Fight: to Have Faith** Fintry, 4/6/2006, am

what this strong faith is like, and its consequences, and they tell us (through the pages of Scripture) their experience

- they are witnesses to how God has enabled them to exercise faith
- *(Not blind faith, not mere will-power, but supreme confidence in the one who speaks to us, to whose voice we are responding - Jesus, our great high priest, our Saviour...)*
- There are a number of means we can use to increase our faith:
 - recalling hard times, times when it hasn't been easy but faith has proved real - either in our own experience (eg for me...), or from Scripture - all we are doing then is "fixing our eyes on Jesus" (12:2)
 - knowing the Scriptures more, the example of the faith of Paul and Silas in prison, or Abraham obeying God's word to give up his son, or... or Christ himself (12:3)
 - getting rid of excess baggage - runner in a race - 12:1
- The Father is seeking to increase our faith:
 - (see 12:7)
 - see us grow in this defining characteristic of his children
 - but we choose how we respond to the Father's efforts to increase our faith (times of trouble, Scripture's testimony, etc)

How will we respond?

- How will we respond?
 - will we press on? draw near to God? hold unswervingly to our Christian hope? spur one another on to good works? not give up meeting together?
 - its not child rearing by numbers - God does this and out pops a mature Christian...!
- God has spoken - critically through his Word written, the Scriptures, sometimes in other ways to us
 - how will we respond?
 - are we growing?
 - in faith?