

## FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT SERMON – FAITHFULNESS

Last week Charmaine began by asking us what comes to mind when we think of the fruit of 'gentleness'. And she showed us that beautiful image of the lioness with the cub in her mouth.

As a visual person this kind of exercise really speaks to me, so I want to repeat it

When you think of the life-giving quality of '**faithfulness**' what comes to mind for you. Where do you see expressions of faithfulness in the everyday experiences and relationships of life?

### PAUSE TIME – FEEDBACK

For me the very first thing that came to mind was this couple. My Mum and Dad.

This is Mum and dad with me and my 2 brothers singing on Dads 85<sup>th</sup> birthday 9 years ago.

The other is in Stratford Upon Avon 7 years ago with a young Myah.

Many of you know that Mum passed away 2 years ago and in 20 days' time Dad will celebrate his 94<sup>th</sup> birthday. I've recently made the decision that I want to be there to share this with him, so I'm leaving on Wednesday for 3 weeks to spend time with my precious UK family.

### So why do Mum and Dad so capture the Godly quality of faithfulness for me?

Because in and though their enduring love, they gave us the gift of life.

They faithfully nurtured us and empowered us to discover our giftings and to follow our aspirations. They showed us what goodness to others looked like ... and they showed this same goodness to us.

### They were a constant faithful presence.

They were always there to encourage and support all their family and friends.

Always around to help us pick up the pieces of our mistakes and to be alongside in the struggles that were not our own making. AND they also challenged us when we needed challenging.

And as you can see the faithfulness of their selfless love endured down the generations.

### And here's my lasting takeaway from all of this.

Because of the faithful love that they showed to their children, their grandchildren and great grandchildren, we have all responded faithfully, in love, to them.

### And really this is the core truth of our Christian calling.

### We are called to be faithful, in response to the faithfulness of God to us.

God (as in the Father, Son and Holy Spirit) is described throughout scripture as the One who is constantly present. The One who is **steadfast** in love and mercy. Always good and always faithful.

**STEADFAST** is not a word we hear or use too often in our modern language but it's a core description of **God** in scripture.

**The Hebrew word is CHESED**, and it describes the quality of an unwavering, resolute loyalty, A commitment of LOVE that endures through the times of trial and testing.

Listen to how scripture beautifully depicts this Eternal truth of God's unchanging nature.

- Lamentations 3:22: "**The steadfast love of the Lord *never* ceases; his mercies *never* come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.**"
- Psalm 100:5 "**For the LORD is good and His love *endures forever*; His faithfulness *continues* through all generations**".
- Psalm 111:7-8 "The works of His hands are ***faithful*** and just; all God's precepts (teachings and guidelines) are ***trustworthy***. They are established ***for ever and ever***, enacted in ***faithfulness*** and uprightness".

These are wonderful, inspiring verses that reveal to us a very profound truth. It's the golden thread that runs throughout the whole bible. God's fidelity to EVERYTHING that is sacred and life-giving. God's fidelity to all the qualities that are enduring and eternal in nature.

This is the love that never fails. And it means we can trust completely in God's teachings and promises.

**So what does our calling to be faithful to this faithfulness of God look like,  
in the context of our sermon series?**

**I want to offer three expressions of faithfulness, drawn from the wisdom of our three scripture passages. Beginning with the wisdom of St Paul. **LIVING BY THE SPIRIT'S POWER****

**Our whole series has been about one core theme.**

With all of the temptations and seductions of the technological influence on our lives - how can we faithfully resist the forces that are life-diminishing and instead, faithfully cultivate the life-giving forces that are the fruit of the Holy Spirit?

In his letter to the church community in Galatia, Paul spells out what happens when the cultural forces that are life-diminishing get the better of things and produce the bad fruit of our human nature. And Paul gives a long list of what these look like. What I want to focus on is the very telling truth he gives with these words.

**"These two forces are constantly fighting each other."**

**This is another golden thread that's runs through all of Scripture.**

There is always a struggle going on between the forces of God that are life-bringing and the forces that work against the grain of God's will and way. **And as CS Lewis so wisely puts it... "If we go against the grain of the universe expect to get splinters.** Not just as in personal 'ouch'. But also, a splintering and fragmenting of the human condition. So put very simply, the calling of the Church for these cultural times... to be **faithful and steadfast** to that which does not bring splinters.

**And for Paul there is always one core wisdom on HOW we do this.**

And to emphasise this truth, did you notice that he begins and ends with this same wisdom.

**Verse 16 So I say to you, let the Holy Spirit guide your lives.**

**Verse 25 Since we are living by the Spirit, let us follow the Spirit's leading in every part of our lives.**

**Which seems to me like perfect spiritual common sense from Paul.**

If we want to cultivate the life-giving fruit of the Holy Spirit for our lives, we need to seek the Spirit's guidance to empower us to do this. As Paul also says...**"The Spirit gives us desires that are the opposite of what the sinful nature desires.**

**And on Tuesday at the ESOL Alpha we had a pertinent reminder of everything we've been exploring in this sermon series.**

Every week we watch a video and there is always a pause break question to encourage conversation. **This week one of the questions was ... Where do you go to seek guidance for your life?**

How telling is it that one person in my group and 3 in Jeremy's said exactly the same thing. What do you think it was? They said that for guidance, they go to AI and Chat Gpt.

One of them actually said ...that what we as humans are seeking in God - we will eventually be able to find in AI. And we shouldn't be surprised by this because there are many others who share this same thought.

All the more reason ... that all followers of Christ are faithful to the God of the Universe rather than the god of the Techno-verse. Nourish our hearts and minds with the beauty, truth and goodness of the God of the universe.

**The second expression I want to give of what it looks like for us to be faithful to God's faithfulness is given in our passage from the Book of Hebrews. And it's a beautiful reminder.**

**<sup>8</sup> By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going.**

One of our biggest challenges is to stay faithful in times of uncertainty. And this is such a powerful expression of what it looks like to **walk by faith** in a journey of uncertainty.

There will be many of us here today and tuning in online, who are facing this challenge. On a journey not even sure of where we are going. We don't know where our trial is taking us.

The wisdom of scripture tells us, that the only posture that can give us true peace, is the same as Abrahams. To surrender in trust to God's faithfulness. (Spirit lead me where my trust is without borders)  
And in Sarah we see the same powerful picture of trusting in God. <sup>11</sup> **And by faith Sarah, who was past childbearing age, was enabled to bear children because she considered that God would be faithful to His promise.**

This is the core truth that the book of Hebrews gives to us.

That so many of the Old Testament saints had faith in the invisible work of God.

Abraham never saw his descendants become **"as numerous as the stars in the sky."** Moses never entered the Promised Land. And none of the Old Testament saints lived to see their Messiah.

But they were faithful to their belief that God is good, and God will do what God promises.

The truth of 2 Corinthians 5:7 **They lived by faith and not by sight.**

They were faithful to a long obedience in the same direction.

My personal encouragement from all of this, is to be reminded that all of our challenges in the present moment - sit within the promise of the Eternal Perspective.

**And this really brought to mind something that's been front and centre  
for me these past weeks. THE FAITHFULNESS OF OUR OLDER GENERATIONS**

You may remember that back in June one of our long-standing faithful's, Roley Rackley, passed away. A week before he died, I was sitting in a ward with Roley in Auckland hospital. There was just the two of us and Roley was unconscious. I prayed over Roley, sang a couple of his favourite songs and felt quite emotional. I started thinking about Roley and his late wife Elizabeth and my memories of them. They were both very supportive and encouraging to our family when we arrived from the UK.

I thought about their faithfulness, to God's faithfulness, and how their faith had inspired them to make life-giving contributions to this community and way beyond. It was actually this time with Roley that prompted me to come home and immediately book my air ticket to see my own father.

And then 12 days ago, I had the privilege of leading the service for Craig Pollock, which was another celebration of a life lived in faithfulness, in response to the faithfulness of God. And as I look out now, (here in the church and online) I see, and I know so many who have been and still are - a faithful presence in this community and beyond. Faithfully aspiring to be the salt and light of Christ in all the arenas of your lives.

**And it's prompted me to voice something that's always bothered and saddened me.**

Which is the tendency at times for church communities to undervalue the presence of their older generations. Now let me make clear straightaway, this isn't about young versus old. I'm equally passionate about valuing our young people and people of all ages. But it does sadden me when I hear people sounding almost apologetic about how many older people are in a community.

It saddens me even more when I hear this from the older generation themselves. I've actually heard people with grey hair commenting on how many grey hairs there are in a church community. It's not malicious it's just a tad short-sighted. I've heard older people almost apologising for their own presence. **To which I want to say, "Stop! ... Don't apologise for your faithfulness to God".**

You are the people who have turned up week in and week out, for so many years.

**You have walked the long obedience in the same direction.** You are the people who have contributed your time, talents and money that enables us to do ministry to **all the age groups.** God wants all of our faithfulness. God wants the old to dream dreams, and our young to see visions.

It is a reality, that in some church communities there can be older people who stifle and block the movement of the Spirit's leading, but I never see this here at St George's. All I see are prayer warriors who want nothing more than to see our young people thrive and flourish. But there are many complex reasons why the church has lost the younger generation down the years, not least, the commitment of young people themselves to being part of a church community. But in my time here, I've witnessed many incredibly faithful and committed young leaders, and we have them now in Callum, Evan, Millie and Sylvia.

Our deepest desire here at St George's ....is that whatever age and stage of life we are at, we are community who walk in faithfulness **together**. To nurture and nourish our Christian faith **together**. Because every single person of whatever age, is part of God's kingdom and equally valuable to God.

Think about this! How many places are there in today's world, where the young and the old can be both a gift and a blessing to each other? We want to do all we can to faithfully encourage this counter cultural gift.

**And this is the picture I always have of this gift.**

A church community is always looking to bear the good fruit of the Spirit. With new buds that blossom and thrive. But a community can only do this, if it has a solid trunk with its roots deep in the Kingdom soil.

Rooted in prayer and rooted in Christ. Rooted in a desire to follow the Spirit's leading and guiding in every part of our lives. Rooted in a steadfast unwavering commitment to walk in faithfulness as a response to the faithfulness of God. Father Son and Holy Spirit. And with all this in mind, what we would really love, is for all of our community to be intentional about holding all of our young people in prayers over the coming weeks.

**I'll finish where we should always finish... with Jesus Christ.**

I chose the Gethsemane passage because nowhere will you see a greater embodiment of unwavering faithfulness to trust in God, than this. In the midst of his own profound sorrow - His intense spiritual agony – and a very human temptation to avoid the cost of the Cross... Jesus still finds the wherewithal to say ...

**“Father, not my will, but yours be done”.**

We see this throughout his entire ministry, Jesus always chooses to remain faithful to the Eternal Truth... no matter the trial of his present moment. **Because Jesus knows the deepest truth of them all.**

**That the steadfast love of the Lord *never* ceases; his mercies *never* come to an end; they are new *every* resurrection morning; because great is God's faithfulness."**

And I pray that this abiding truth can be deeply known by you, whatever the trials of your life circumstances.

#### **QUESTIONS FOR YOU TO REFLECT ON A THE MUSIC PLAYS**

- How might you more faithfully and intentionally seek the Spirit's leading and guiding for every part of your lives?
- In your own journey of uncertainty, how might you surrender in trust to God's faithfulness to know God's peace? Let your challenge of the present moment, sit within the promise of the Eternal Perspective.
- What has been the greatest blessing of your long obedience in the same direction?