

COLLECT, READINGS AND REFLECTION
7 August, 8th Sunday after Trinity

COLLECT

Almighty Lord and everlasting God,
we beseech you to direct, sanctify and govern
both our hearts and bodies
in the ways of your laws
and the works of your commandments;
that through your most mighty protection, both here and ever,
we may be preserved in body and soul;
through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

Psalm 33.12–22*

- 12 Happy the nation whose God is the Lord ♦
and the people he has chosen for his own.
- 13 The Lord looks down from heaven ♦
and beholds all the children of earth.
- 14 From where he sits enthroned he turns his gaze ♦
on all who dwell on the earth.
- 15 He fashions all the hearts of them ♦
and understands all their works.
- 16 No king is saved by the might of his host; ♦
no warrior delivered by his great strength.
- 17 A horse is a vain hope for deliverance; ♦
for all its strength it cannot save.
- 18 Behold, the eye of the Lord
is upon those who fear him, ♦
on those who wait in hope for his steadfast love,
- 19 To deliver their soul from death ♦
and to feed them in time of famine.
- 20 Our soul waits longingly for the Lord; ♦
he is our help and our shield.
- 21 Indeed, our heart rejoices in him; ♦
in his holy name have we put our trust.
- 22 Let your loving-kindness, O Lord, be upon us, ♦
as we have set our hope on you.

A reading from the letter to the Hebrews, Chapter 11, verses 1-3 and 8 -16

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. ²Indeed, by faith our ancestors received approval. ³By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible.

⁸ By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to set out for a place that he was to receive as an inheritance; and he set out, not knowing where he was going. ⁹By faith he stayed for a time in the land he had been promised, as in a foreign land, living in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. ¹⁰For he looked forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. ¹¹By faith he received power of procreation, even though he was too old—and Sarah herself was barren—because he considered him faithful who had promised. ¹²Therefore from one person, and this one as good as dead, descendants were born, 'as many as the stars of heaven and as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.'

¹³ All of these died in faith without having received the promises, but from a distance they saw and greeted them. They confessed that they were strangers and foreigners on the earth, ¹⁴for people who speak in this way make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. ¹⁵If they had been thinking of the land that they had left behind, they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; indeed, he has prepared a city for them.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Alleluia, Alleluia.

I am the good shepherd, says the Lord; I know my sheep and my own know me.

Alleluia.

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Luke, Chapter 12, verses 32 – 40

Glory to you, O Lord.

Jesus said, 'Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. ³³Sell your possessions, and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. ³⁴For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

³⁵ 'Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit; ³⁶be like those who are waiting for their master to return from the wedding banquet, so that they may open the door for him as soon as he comes and knocks. ³⁷Blessed are those slaves whom the master finds alert when he comes; truly I tell you, he will fasten his belt and have them sit down to eat, and he will come and serve them. ³⁸If he comes during the middle of the night, or near dawn, and finds them so, blessed are those slaves.

³⁹ 'But know this: if the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. ⁴⁰You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.'

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

A Reflection from Peter....

Both our readings this week explore something of what it means to live by faith – but they do it in very different ways. The letter to Hebrews, from which our first reading came, is unique in the New Testament. We know nothing of the author, and very little of the community to which the letter was written. It is clear that this was a group of Jewish converts – and a group that was very proud of its Jewish inheritance and deeply rooted in it. It is not surprising then that the author, trying to convey something of what it means to 'live by faith' takes several key figures from the Old Testament to help us imagine what making the journey of faith involves. Indeed, the writer takes us back to the beginning – to Abraham, and Isaac and Jacob. Most of us have the privilege of settled backgrounds and families with deep roots. Think for a moment what it must have been like for the Windrush generation to set out from the West Indies and arrive in England for the first time; or what it must be like for those desperate migrants, fleeing appalling conditions and violence and risking hazardous journeys in order to make it to a country that is then likely to try to reject them. With this in mind, we begin to see what it meant for Abraham to set out 'not knowing where he was going...' but trusting that God was indeed calling him on.

In the passage from Luke, Jesus uses a range of images to stimulate the imagination and so to take the risk of faith. Jesus seems more vague than the writer of the letter to Hebrews. He talks about getting ready, about living in a state of expectant preparation – which is fine in the short term, but none of us would want to do it for long! The passage is an odd mixture of carrots and sticks: of course you take precautions to prevent your house being burgled, but you don't sit up every night just inside the porch with a loaded shotgun... And the promise of the kingdom is serious: we want to believe it. But it would be rash to go out and sell everything you have at the first hint of the kingdom. As we listen to the words of Jesus, we do find our imagination being kindled, but we're not quite sure what it means!

And neither passage directly asks, "What is faith"? Yet the whole purpose of both passages is to enable us to understand better what it is to live by faith. Here both the letter to the Hebrews and St Paul give us further help. At the beginning of Chapter 11 of Hebrews we read, 'Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.' And St Paul says, so memorably, 'for we walk by faith, not by sight!' (2 Cor 5.7) God has already embraced us in love. Faith invites us to trust that unseen love and go on our way, confident that God will always be before us and with us.