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Hebrews 11. 1-3, 8-16

Luke 12. 32-40

I have a colleague who used to wear a T-shirt with the words across it: *Jesus is coming – Look busy*. Like all good jokes it was both outrageous and true, flushing out what might be an unexamined belief or some absurdity.

You need to busy doing the Lord's work, otherwise watch out! You need to be busy doing the Lord's work – otherwise you might be numbered among the goats. You need to be busy doing the Lord's work – being a good little Protestant – idle hands are the devil's workshop. Look busy! And of course, if you need to explain it,

You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour. We might affirm that we are saved by grace – but somewhere lurking in the background there may be a belief about worthiness, about measuring up, being busy, not being lazy, being good enough. Somewhere lurking there is a measure of some kind because there will be a moment when ... Maybe we were given that self-belief in the air we breathed as children and have not been able to shake it off.

Listening to Robyn Whitaker on *By the Well* this week she noted that maybe the word faith in the phrase at the beginning of the Hebrews reading is better translated as trust. *Now trust is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.* ² *Indeed, by trust our ancestors received approval.* ³ *By trust 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.*

Our difficulty with the word faith is that it has been a bit abused for us, being led to understand that faith is something you have enough of, or that faith is believing by sheer dint of our will. Someone might have said to you that you need to have more faith. In such an understanding faith becomes a work, a measure of worthiness, and that we will be judged on the adequacy or lack of it.

But this is not what trust is. Trust is something that we have toward someone; toward a situation. We might say that our trust has been vindicated, when what we hoped for has come about, or that we have not been betrayed or let down. We might say that our trust has been naïve, or ill-founded when things come unstuck or fall apart. We might have found ourselves in situations where our trust has been betrayed. In a marriage; in our work situation, amongst siblings. These are painful, deeply distressing experiences of the human condition. The psalms are full of anguished cries from people whose trust has been betrayed.

Trust is an assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

Trust is the spirit or posture toward someone. We may find that someone is trustworthy but the action of trust, the action of faith, is ours – ours toward. And this action toward I feel is the clue to the nature of faith. We say that Jesus was faithful toward God – Jesus trusted God and in his trusting he made possible a certain image of Go; he made visible, the invisible. He is the image of

the invisible God, the first born of a new creation - something which we thought was impossible, which may have been invisible and which is now visible, now realised.

Jesus understood that the very nature of God is a radical, all-encompassing grace. And what the grace of God makes possible is radical freedom; freedom from all those things which close in around us and tell us that we must be worthy in some way – otherwise watch out. This is the nature of all human societies and gatherings of humans. We develop – openly or in covert ways - measures of worthy belonging. But the Gospel offers us radical freedom which frees us from these constraints which corrode the soul and prevent us from living by grace.

The apostle Paul writes to the Galatians saying that we are saved by the faith of Jesus Christ; saved by the faithfulness of Jesus toward a particular image of God. In Jesus' testing in the wilderness we see in him a non-anxious and total trust of God; trust in God. Not that God will fix it; not that God will save Jesus – and this is certainly one of the tests; but Jesus' trust is absolute. And by trust Jesus received approval – you are my son, the beloved. *Do not be anxious, little children. It is the Father's good pleasure.*

But we have been so formed by the notion that faith, trust is something we must have enough of; trusting against the odds; trusting against God's silence; trusting, against all the evidence. The obstacles to us dwelling in grace are very great.

I believe it helps for us to think about God when we talk about trust, God's trustworthiness; not our trustingness. Many of you will know what it means to be betrayed, let down by someone we trusted – someone we thought should be trustworthy, but ultimately was not. Why? Probably because they were human.

Is it, though, that we can say that God is utterly trustworthy, will not, will never let us down? I don't think we can say this either. If we say that God is utterly trustworthy in terms that God will never let us down, then what can we say of the cross: *father, take this cup from me; my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*

No. I think this trustworthiness of God is that God will not condemn us, will not cast us off? We can say this because this is the discovery of grace which is the gift of the second half of life – the born-again life, the new life, the resurrection which may take place when something we hold as utterly secure crumbles and we find ourselves falling into the grace of God. In this place of brokenness we discover a strange wholeness; we discover a divinely gifted freedom. This is a place in which we are free to be. Simply be.

And in this place things we thought impossible, suddenly are possible; things which were invisible, to which our eyes were blind, are suddenly visible.

For me this place of freedom is a place of imagination; where things which were invisible, suddenly become visible. We live in a time of faux creativity; false, manufactured creativity. A place where children are given computers and tablets with some program on them which parents are told will make them creative. Their imaginations are boxed in, pre-packaged.

When we begin to know this graced freedom of God, a being under the gaze of God who is grace, the imagining of a life rooted in divine freedom begins to unfold. For all of us this is the country

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Trusting-toward is a gift we may receive personally, but it also the gift and calling to the Christian community. We are called to be a new creation and a place where the Spirit is visible. The Spirit is not present simply because we say so. We must practice this together. As we must practice growing in grace personally, we must also practice growing in grace collectively, jointly; practice basking in the radical freedom of divine grace. And as we do this together we may find ourselves drawn forward, drawn toward realising, discovering, seeing that which we thought was invisible, impossible, heavenly, not earthly.

For this to come about together calls for shared commitment to this leaning forward – as collectively we desire for a better country, a better habitation – the shared trusting enables the emergence of new, unimagined possibilities.

If we are good at anything in the church, we are good at worrying about the future. But, as Wendell Berry writes, the future will take of itself, our task is to be faithful, to do well in the present, and if we do well in the present, he says, the future also will be good.

This personal and collective practice of making space for grace is a laying up of treasure in heaven. Not heaven as pie in the sky when you die. But as *your kingdom come, as in heaven so on earth*. This mysterious coming kingdom is our calling, our gift, and we bring about the kingdom, the reign of God by leaning toward it, ready, watchful, alert – not alert and alarmed – as in look busy because Jesus is coming – but alert because our hearts are alert to signs of the reign of God breaking into the darkness and imprisonment, both within and around us.

Right across the church we are anxious for solutions and programs and fixes to our sense of loss; attempts to revive us again. But as Mother Theresa says: God doesn't want us to be successful, just faithful.

So as you prepare for the next phase of your life together, I pray you will jointly find ways of leaning into the divine grace and that in this shared trusting you will see the reign of God coming.

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