**A Practical Faith. Luke 12:32-40. Hebrews 11: 1-3, 8-16. August 7 2022**

There is significant interest in spirituality in our day. The interest manifests itself in various ways. Many who experience severe grief look to astrology and mediums to seek to ease their pain. Some who battle addictions, who have experienced severe trauma or who are plagued by extreme anxiety may seek a spirituality that encompasses an element of escapism, a reprieve from oppressive thoughts. The spirituality that we encounter in Jesus is very practical, firmly rooted in everyday life. There is no escapism in the faith which Jesus describes and practices. There is however healing and hope.

Faith is a very broad term. We use it as both a verb and a noun. We speak of our Christian faith, yet we also speak of having faith in God. The Greek term used in the New Testament *pistis* can mean belief, trust, and faithfulness and encompasses concepts of assurance and endurance. The two passages we have heard today give us some very practical illustrations of how we live out our faith in God. This faith is outwardly focused, emerging from a trusting relationship with God.

**This faith is focused on giving not grasping.**

It flows out of a relationship with God where we are blessed by the amazing generosity and grace of God. Jesus reminds his followers that it is “your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom”.  On this basis they are immediately encouraged to divest themselves of unnecessary possessions and to give generously to those in need. Just before this passage Jesus has warned his followers that they will need to grapple with the pervasive power of becoming anxious about the basic needs of their lives. Using various illustrations from God’s care for the natural world, he encouraged them to trust God when challenged with this anxiety. Now the challenge is extended. Now they are encouraged to embrace a simple lifestyle characterised by generosity. “The alternative to anxiety over what we do not possess or control, is to release our grasp of that which we do control.”[[1]](#footnote-1) Divestment and generosity is to be engaged in with the understanding that God is the supreme provider and God can be trusted to provide all they need.[[2]](#footnote-2) Giving also has the effect of embracing the needy as one’s own inner circle.[[3]](#footnote-3)

*Robert Gilmore Le Tourneau, was an incredibly influential Christian businessman. He dropped out of school at end of grade six, but became a hard working labourer, pioneering the development of earth moving and construction equipment. Despite getting into debt early in his career, through under-estimating costs involved in contracts he undertook, by the early 1930’s, in the midst of the great depression, he became very successful. In 1935 his wife suggested that they resolve to live on 10% of their income and give 90% to the work of God this they continued to do this throughout their lives. He donated many millions of dollars to Christian endeavours. His reputation for generosity caused him to become known colloquially as “God’s businessman”.*

The generosity that Jesus stressed stretches beyond material possessions. Jesus followers are encouraged to be generous with their service also. The second part of the gospel reading urged the disciples to be watchful, diligent and eager to serve. Using the illustration of the servants awaiting the late return of their master, they are challenged to offer service at whatever time he may arrive. They were told to *“gird their loins*” this phrase refers to a vigorous form of activity. “Servants need to be devoted to their tasks refusing to let distractions, fatigue or delay divert them from their duties”[[4]](#footnote-4) Giving freely, generously of themselves in service is to mark their lives. The implication for us is to be as devoted to the work of God’s kingdom as devoted slaves waiting for their master to return home.[[5]](#footnote-5)

This service is to be characterised by humility, in the story even the master humbly serves the faithful slaves.[[6]](#footnote-6)

In Hebrews 11 the catalogue of heroes of the faith, part of which we heard today, shows a variety of ways in which they served God, but consistently, these leaders demonstrated humility. There was no grasping for attention or honour. “They lived out their faith without an eye for an audience, [therefore] they are an example to us.”[[7]](#footnote-7) They simply gave their service to God.

**This faith is based on remaining alert to God.**

Jesus calls his followers to remain alert like servants waiting for their master, listening for him.

In Luke’s gospel the disciples failed to remain alert in various situations. “Watchfulness in Luke’s gospel is marked by prayer, while sleep indicates neglect and unpreparedness.”[[8]](#footnote-8) In the days of the early Christian movement, the disciples will need to be prayerfully listening to God as they seek to take the gospel to other areas.

Abraham was familiar with listening to God who guided him in quite challenging ways. He was willing to leave that which was secure, prosperous, peaceful and enjoyable to journey into the unknown with God. He had to place his complete trust in God, through his obedience, even when baffled by God’s word to him. His faith grows as he recalls God’s faithfulness and remains alert to the voice of God. The strength of his relationship with God is key to his faithfulness to God.

So often heroes of the faith needed to exercise great patience as the fulfillment of God’s promises often happened many years after the promise was communicated to them. Fred Craddock has said, *“Faith is tenacious and enduring, able to accept promises deferred in the conviction that death itself does not annul God’s promises.”[[9]](#footnote-9)*

It was also necessary that they kept their eyes on God’s activity, on those things which were often unseen. Hebrews reminds us that faith is the proof, demonstration, conviction of things unseen.[[10]](#footnote-10) They needed to keep looking beyond their situation to discern the activity of God. In focusing on God’s activity and co-operating with God they could be part of the work of God’s kingdom. In this way they could cultivate “treasure in heaven”.

There appears to be a strong connection between the focus of our hearts and the reality of what we treasure. If we are focused on treasuring our possessions, this will be a strong focus of our hearts. If we however are focused on treasuring what God is doing, our hearts and our actions can be directed by God, we can develop a new perspective.

When this new perspective is operating our values change. We can embrace the values of God’s kingdom.

So as we go into this week it may be useful to consider our attitude to our possessions. Do we hold our possessions loosely, could we give them away if we sensed God challenging us to do so? How would we evaluate our generosity? Not just with our financial resources but also with serving others, giving our time, working behind the scenes. How are we going with listening to God? How are we going in sharing the values of God’s Kingdom? “What value do we give to reconciling broken relationships, sharing the gospel of God’s love, and working for peace and justice for the oppressed?”[[11]](#footnote-11)How well are we listening to the cries of those in need? Are we ready to do more than simply praying for those in need?

1. R. Alan Culpepper, “The Gospel of Luke: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections” in Leander E. Keck, *The New Interpreters Bible: A Commentary on Twelve Volumes,*(Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1995) 260 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke,* (Grand Rapids: Michigan: Wm B. Eerdmans, 1997) 495 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Green, *The Gospel of Luke,* 496 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Culpepper, “The Gospel of Luke: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections” 265 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Culpepper, “The Gospel of Luke: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections” 265 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Green, *The Gospel of Luke,* 499 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Raymond Brown, *The Message of Hebrews,* (Nottingham, England: Inter Varsity Press, 1982) 210 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Culpepper, “The Gospel of Luke: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections” 263 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Fred B. Craddock, “The Letter to the Hebrews: Commentary and Reflections” in Leander E. Keck, *The New Interpreters Bible: A Commentary on Twelve Volumes,*(Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1995) 146 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Hebrews 11:1 [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Culpepper, “The Gospel of Luke: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections” 261 [↑](#footnote-ref-11)