

“Loving God, loving each other, loving Brackley”



The vicar writes.....



"We find everywhere in this world the traces of a revealed God and of a hidden God; revealed enough to strengthen our faith, concealed enough to try our faith." (Philip Schaff)

The issue of doubt has recently cropped up a number of times with a number of different people. Everyone who has faith will experience times of doubt and, since this is a universal Christian experience, I want to share some thoughts that have helped me over the years. So then, here are *4 big encouragements for the doubter*.

1. Doubt is not the same as unbelief

There is a world of difference between weak faith (doubt) and faithlessness (unbelief). A weak faith in Jesus Christ more than gets the job done. In Matthew 17:20, Jesus tells his disciples they have "so little faith" and yet, "If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you."

Clearly, what matters is not the size of our faith but the object of our faith: even a tiny trust in the right place (in an almighty God) makes all things possible, but an enormous trust in anything else does not. A doubtful 999 caller can be just as rescued from a fire as a confident one, but a 111 caller... not so much! Well, Christianity is also about trusting a rescuer (a saviour) and we are saved by that faith. It's all about putting our faith in the right person and not the quality of that faith.

If you are worried about your doubts, let me encourage you that (ironically) it's probably a good sign of a softened heart and evidence of the Spirit's work in your life. Only the faithless person doesn't worry about doubt! Take heart: doubt is not the same as unbelief. [For more on this, there is a book called *Help My Unbelief* by Barnabas Piper.]

2. Doubt can actually strengthen faith

It is often those who have doubted the hardest whose belief is the strongest. If you have intellectual questions about whether Christianity is true, don't suppress them, pursue them. The more we face head on the strongest arguments against our faith, the more we will doubt

our doubts and discover that Christianity stands up to scrutiny. If you want to have confidence in a chair before you sit on it, give it a shake, give it a strength test. Then you can have peace of mind. Much better than perching on it gingerly feeling it might crumble at any moment. The same is true of Christianity: if in doubt, give it a shake!

A writer called Trevin Wax says this, "I'm always heartened to see church members asking good questions about what they believe. Far too many Christians through the ages have sought to maintain the engine of faith on the fumes of their father and mother's devotion, never wrestling with questions about not only what they believe but why. Examining pressure points does not indicate one's faith is weak, but that the faith is strong—solid enough to withstand such inquiry." So then, come to the Hope Explored course at St Peter's in the new year, or ask me for a book recommendation, or type your burning question into the bethinking.org website. Because doubt can actually strengthen faith.

3. Doubt of self is necessary for faith

G.K. Chesterton once wrote, "In dealing with the arrogant assertor of doubt, it is not the right method to tell him to stop doubting. It is rather the right method to tell him to go on doubting, to doubt a little more, to doubt every day newer and wilder things in the universe, until at last, by some strange enlightenment, he may begin to doubt himself."

Doubt of self is absolutely necessary for faith. When somebody says to me, "I'm not worthy to be a Christian," or "God could never accept me," they are doubting themselves. And it is music to my ears, because Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners," in Mark 2:17. And because it was the humble tax collector not the proud Pharisee who went home justified in Luke 18:9-14. You see, faith in God actually requires us to lay down faith in self: our own abilities, our own righteousness, our own worthiness. It is only once we come to the end of ourselves that we can fully rely on God.

Therefore, Christian faith is the polar opposite to self-reliance or independently standing on our own two feet. Instead, it is a desperate cry for help from a rescuer (see above). By definition, to say "I believe in Jesus" is also to say "I don't believe in myself." It is only once we realise that we don't deserve God's love that we can start to receive it for the free gift it is. Self-doubt is therefore utterly necessary for saving faith.

4. Jesus is gentle with those who doubt

“O ye of little faith” is a phrase you hear a lot today. It comes from the Gospels, where Jesus said it repeatedly. But, here’s the interesting thing, who did he say it to? Not his enemies, as we might guess, but his followers (e.g. Matt. 6:30, 8:26, 14:31, 16:8). Please see how encouraging this is: Jesus’ followers are, and always have been, those of “little faith”. And Jesus is, and always has been, unbelievably patient with such people.

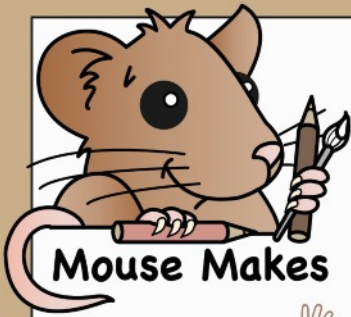
Take, for example, the most famous doubter of the lot. ‘Doubting Thomas’ had seen Jesus turn gallons of H₂O into vintage Châteauneuf-du-Pape (or equivalent). Thomas had seen Jesus feed thousands with a packed lunch. Thomas had seen him calm the storm, heal the blind, raise the dead. And yet, at the crucial moment, it wasn’t enough for Thomas. “Unless I see the nail marks... and put my hand into his side, I will not believe” (John 20:25). How does Jesus respond? Jesus doesn’t humiliate, exclude or lambast Thomas. He even grants the over-the-top request. Then Thomas remains one of the twelve apostles, hand-picked to take the gospel to the world (Acts 1:13). But Jesus does give Thomas the prod he needs: “Stop doubting and believe.” Maybe you need it too.

So then, doubting Toms and doubting Tinas, don’t panic. Jesus is “gentle and lowly” and “a bruised reed he will not break, and a smouldering wick he will not snuff out” (Matt. 11:29, 12:20). Bring your doubts to him without fear, and echo the prayer of the father in Mark 9, “I believe; help my unbelief.” Belief is ultimately a gift from God (Eph. 2:8), it’s one he loves to give, and it’s an enormous blessing to receive (John 20:29).

800 Appeal progress



For every £10,000 raised for the 800 Appeal, another pane of glass is coloured in. Thanks to those who have already contributed. We look forward to watching the colour spread and hope that by the end of the year we have a full window!



Mouse Makes

"Do not be anxious about anything,
but in every situation, by
_____ and _____
with thanksgiving, present your
_____ to God."

Philippians 4:6-7 NIV

"The _____
is _____
to all who _____
on him in _____"

Psalms 145:18

"For where two or three
_____ in my name, there
I am with them."
Matthew 18:20

SAV SORRY

PRAY FOR OTHERS

PRAY FOR YOURSELF

THANK GOD

FOR MY FAMILY

PRAY FOR FRIENDS

PRAY FOR THE NEEDY

PRAY FOR THE SICK

PRAY FOR THE CHURCH

PRAISE GOD

PRAY FOR THE CHURCH

CON F E S S P K R Q C
N E A R M D P E H E A R
T I M E E D A T E Q M Y
I Q E J D T P I P U E O
F P V O I R P T R E N U
O R D I T U R I A S K T
R A E C A T O O Y T P R
G I V E T H A N K S R A
I S O S E S C A P R A Y
V E T G A T H E R U Y E
E L E C A L L I S T E N
M U B L E S S R L O R D

NIV

Look up the Bible verses, fill in the blanks then find them in the word search

Find these words too:
APPROACH
MEDITATE
HEAR • LISTEN
BLESS • PRAISE
FORGIVE • NAME
CRY OUT • AMEN

" _____
always, _____
continually, _____
_____ in all circumstances."
1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

"Therefore, _____
your sins to one another and
_____ for one another,
that you may be healed."
James 5:16

" _____
yourselves
to prayer, being
watchful and
thankful."
Colossians 4:2

Christmas decorations have arrived in the shops so it must be time to start planning!

The decorations to herald the season begin for us at the start of Advent , the first Sunday which is December 3rd this year, the beginning of the new liturgical year, when we wait for the arrival of Jesus who , according to tradition was born on Christmas Day. .

It's a special Church , community and family time when we wait and celebrate and share in the excitement and anticipation of the arrival of Christmas Day .

At St Peter's the Church is bustling with lots of school Carol services and Church celebrations and services in December.

For the last ten years we have encouraged Church groups , Brownies, Guides, Scouts, Schools , the Town Council , businesses and community groups to help us decorate our lovely 800 year old Church for everyone to enjoy its beauty

and spirituality and share in the excitement. As it is the 800 anniversary we would love to have the biggest display possible to showcase the wonderful community spirit within Brackley .

Every year it gets bigger and better So again we are asking you to help us by bringing your Christmas Trees. All the details are on the poster here .

Please pass the message around if you are part of a group or club .

The best thing is when you take it home after Christmas you can keep it ready for next year !

Thank you all Caroline





CAROLS *by* CANDELIGHT

7.30pm on Sunday
10th December

St Peter's Church
Brackley

with mulled wine
& mince pies

**REMEMBRANCE SUNDAY
12TH NOVEMBER
HOLY COMMUNION WITH ACT OF REMEMBRANCE
10.00AM
(Please note amended service time)**

Would you like to hear more from St Peter's?

If you are online and would like to receive the weekly Vicar's Update, just send an email to brackleyvicar@gmail.com and ask to receive the church's email bulletin

MAGAZINE SUBSCRIPTION

If you have enjoyed this short online edition of the current magazine you can purchase the full 20 page printed edition for the modest sum of 40p. It is available from Jems on the Market Place.

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Thank you.



The St Peter's Church 800th Anniversary Concert

The premiere of
St Peter's Gloria
by local composer **Roland Johnson**

PLUS

John Rutter's Te Deum

Musical Director: Nick Perry

Saturday 25th November 2023 @7.30 pm

St Peter's Church

Church Road, Brackley, NN137BB

*Tickets: £12.00 Available from choir members or on the door
Students and others in full time education – Free*

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