



Sunday 13th June, 2021

Confidence, conviction and certainty

1. Readings:

1 Corinthians 13:9-12

9 For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; 10 but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. 11 When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. 12 For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known.

John 16:

12 'I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. 13 When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.

Mark 9

21 Jesus asked the father, 'How long has this been happening to him?' And he said, 'From childhood. 22 It has often cast him into the fire and into the water, to destroy him; but if you are able to do anything, have pity on us and help us.' 23 Jesus said to him, 'If you are able!—All things can be done for the one who believes.' 24 Immediately the father of the child cried out, 'I believe; help my unbelief!'

Matthew 26:

37 He took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved and agitated. 38 Then he said to them, 'I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and stay awake with me.' 39 And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed, 'My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want.'

2. Questions:

a. Glen started with three questions:

- When it comes to faith what are some of the things that over the years you have changed your mind?
- When it comes to our faith is it a good thing, or not, to have an open mind?
- Is it possible that you are wrong about Jesus?

b. Glen suggested that confidence gives room for learning and further questions. He said that confidence speaks of integrity over orthodoxy and leaves room for dialogue. Where have you seen such confidence in action?

c. Glen suggested that some evangelicals are very keen on certainty and that it should be what we offer the world. Do you agree? Why?

d. Glen quoted four Bible passages which advocate confidence and conviction over certainty. Are there other passages which actually advocate absolute certainty? If so, what are they?

e. Glen suggested that conviction and confidence spur us into action? Is that your experience? What are God and you currently working on together?

3. Prayers:

Read them slowly...

Empowering God,
 You empower us to be our better selves.
 You help us to understand how much we are loved.
 You see in us our potential for good,
 You give us gifts and strengths, which we can develop and grow.
 Help us to see ourselves and each other in the way you do.
 Empower us to be confident in the gifts which you give us,
 Such as your grace, and the ability to share love.
 Empower us to learn about ourselves, each other and the world.
 Empower us as Spirit to cope when we face struggles.
 Empower us to flourish, even in difficult and hard times
 Empower us to help and serve others.
 Empower us to work for good in all people and all the world.
 Empower us to have the grit and determination to strive always towards better things.
 Empower us to empower others, so that all might share in your love
 This we are empowered to pray.
 Amen.

God,
 As challenge and hardship breaks open the facade
 of my comfortable life,
 As the unforeseen dissolves the illusion of my vision
 of how things should be,
 As that which is shocking awakens me to the truth
 of how little ultimate control I have.
 As the certainty of uncertainty dissolves my self-delusion,
 As my perception of myself is shaken by the perceptions of others,
 May I come to you in faith,
 Not for rescue from circumstance,
 But for strength to endure,
 And the guidance to persevere,
 That I might come to know peace,
 The peace that passes all understanding
 Which is found in you as the Christ.
 This I plead and pray.
 Amen.

4. Notes from the Sermon

Glen started with some questions:

- **When it comes to faith what are some of the things that over the years you have changed your mind?**
- **When it comes to our faith is it a good thing, or not, to have an open mind?**
- **Is it possible that you are wrong about Jesus?**

In our bit of the church – the evangelical tradition – we have been encouraged to reach for and offer to others – certainty. That is a mistake.

'I beseech you in the bowels of Christ, think it possible that you may be mistaken.' Oliver Cromwell

Social media meme – what advice would you give to your 18 year old self?

Or... what would the 23 year old Glen make of the current Glen?

(I suspect he would be unhappy with some things – which is probably healthy and good.)

I'm not advocating doubt in its own right.
Doubt fossilises us, relativism paralyses us.

The Bible urges us to be people of confidence and conviction.

Con-**fide**-nce = with fide (faith)

Believing something enough to act, to go for it.

Confidence gives room for questions – further learning – which certainty doesn't.

Confidence leaves room for further questions.

Confidence speaks of integrity over orthodoxy.

Confidence leaves room for dialogue, (certainty leaves very little room for dialogue).

Confidence and **conviction** = conviction, believing something enough to stake our lives on it.
(Glass bottomed swimming pool 115 ft. up between two buildings).

Hold on to your beliefs. But hold them in an open hand so that God can get at them – so he can add to them, shuffle them, throw a few away, change some of them. God's revelation is perfect, but our grasp of it isn't!

We do see, it is real, but we see dimly through a mirror.

The Spirit leads us into truth – there is a journey to be had.

Jesus in the Garden says, 'If it is possible....' – there wasn't certainty.

With the demon-possessed boy – 'I believe! Help my unbelief.'

Certainty is to be let go of.

Presenting certainty to the world is profoundly damaging. At Glen's church a young lad connected online. He came to faith. He said that he thought that becoming a Christian would mean an end to my questions. But he found a community of people who really believed this stuff and so they could open it up and question it.

Certainty, by contrast, is damaging and unattractive.

As Peter Enns said – there is so much more to learn. Isn't that a good thing?

News story – increasing the age for marriage from 16 to 18.

Reasoning (at least in part) is that many parents force children in to marriage.

Glen was married in 1979 – as teenagers.

It is risky. More teenage marriages fail compared to those who marry later in life.

Was I certain the marriage would last? No, but I was confident; confident enough to do something about it.

I'm also confident that we will stay married, but I'm not certain.

Some final questions (and answers).

Is it possible I am wrong about God, Jesus and Christianity? Yes.

Do I think I am? No.

How confident am I in this? Enough to stake the rest of my life on it.