



Sunday 5th Sept, 2021
Values: 'Faith in Jesus'

1. Introduction

Thank you to all of you who took part in the **Big Church Conversation**, on one, two or all of the 3 evenings that were held online in June, and thank you to those who have sent in messages by email or telephone call or chatted to us in person. If you would like a copy of the summaries of each of the 3 evenings, the 8 pages that Ash referred to then do contact the church office by email next week and we will get them to you, at info@altrinchambaptist.org

The contributions that we have received, the prayers and discernment of the Core Team and Elders will shape our Values and Priorities for the next few years. Today we begin with the first of our Key Values, 'Faith in Jesus'.

2. Reading: Matthew 7:24-27 The Wise and Foolish Builders.

"Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine [the teachings of Jesus] and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. 25 The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. 26 But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. 27 The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash."

3. Questions:

- a) 'Faith in Jesus' is a foundational value. The life, the works and the teachings of Jesus are central to our faith. Reflect on how your faith in Jesus has grown and changed since you became a Christian and identify ways that encourage our faith in Jesus to grow.
- b) Brian shared a video of an extreme rock climber, Alex Honnold, you can watch his remarkable climb on this YouTube clip. No ropes, no climbing equipment apart from a little bag of chalk and a lot of courage. <https://youtu.be/tnRoda7Ke2w> Alex has three principles when climbing, Step out (in faith), hold on and keep moving. His greatest fear is that he might 'freeze' on a climb. What are the principles that we might adopt as we seek to live out our faith in Jesus?
- c) In the message Andrew said; 'The world needs us to live out our Faith in Jesus, to bear witness to Him in every aspect of our lives and proclaim his name.' In what ways do you think that we should do this individually and corporately?
- d) Read again, the words of the parable of the wise and foolish builders in Matthew 7. Share your experiences and describe the nature of 'the rain, the wind and the rising

streams' that have impacted on your faith and how you came through those times. There may have been particular Bible verses that sustained you, prayers and support of others that helped you. How might you help others going through similar times? Allow members of the group to help you if you are going through difficult times right now, share your story and encourage those in the group to pray and offer practical support.

- e) 'Stepping out' is necessary for those who put their faith in Jesus and for extreme rock climbers! In what ways can we exercise our faith in Jesus more frequently and effectively? What are the practical steps that we need to take, our availability, our openness to God's Spirit leading us, our willingness to take risks? Discuss these and other ways. Encourage one another to walk by faith. Share examples and commit to taking steps of faith between now and the next time that you meet.

3. Prayer:

Spend time praying for one another. For the challenges that each of us face at the present time, beginning a new term with restrictions on our activities and concerns about staying safe.

Faith in Jesus requires our undivided loyalty. We are vulnerable to other things demanding our attention and stealing our hearts. In the book of Revelation 2:4,5 To the angel of the church in Ephesus; 'you have forsaken the love you had at first. Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first.'

Let us build our lives on Jesus and his teachings and live by faith in Him that we may be transformed into his likeness.

2Corin 3:18 And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

We need faith to believe. These words are from the Celtic Daily Prayer Book, Evening Prayer:

Expressions of faith

Lord, You have always given
bread for the coming day;
and though I am poor,
today I believe.

Lord, You have always given
strength for the coming day;
and though I am weak,
today I believe.

Lord, You have always given
peace for the coming day;
and though of anxious heart,
today I believe.

Lord, You have always kept
me safe in trials;
and now, tried as I am,
today I believe.

Lord, You have always marked
the road for the coming day;
and though it may be hidden,
today I believe.

Lord, You have always lightened
this darkness of mine;
and though the night is here,
today I believe.

Lord, You have always spoken
when time was ripe;
and though you be silent now,
today I believe.

4. Text of the Sermon:

'Faith in Jesus'

Today we begin with the **first of our Key Values, 'Faith in Jesus'**. But you might be thinking what about our church vision statement? Is that changing? No, it isn't.

Our Church Vision – is 'Be a disciple, Make disciples and Reveal the Kingdom of God' is based on the Greatest Commandment and the Great Commission, Greatest Commandment: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." Matthew 22:37 Great Commission: "...go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Matthew 28:19

This is the generic mission of the church here in Altrincham and worldwide, and therefore has ongoing validity.

Vision Card - We will be updating our Vision card (this is our current vision card), to reflect where we are today and our discernment about God's plan for us for the future... We will be simplifying it, making it clearer, and more accessible for everyone to engage with it and apply it.

The first of our key Values, 'Faith in Jesus'. It was first first key value previously and not surprisingly it remains so. There are two aspects to having 'Faith in Jesus' that I want us to look at this morning. There is **'What we Believe'** and **'What we do'**. What we believe, (orthodoxy) and What we do or how we live, (orthopraxis). our obedience to act on what we know to be true.

What we believe and what we do should be one and the same but we are susceptible to separating them. Our experience all too often is to believe, to be convinced that something is true but not to act upon it, to choose not to live by it. Can you think of an example? How about this one, a dearly loved Bible passage that is often shared as a word of direction and encouragement.

*Trust in the Lord with all your heart
and lean not on your own understanding;
6 in all your ways submit to him,
and he will make your paths straight. Proverbs 3:5,6*

Trust in the Lord, and in all your ways submit to Him. That little word 'all' trips us up! We believe that we should, but we know that we don't submit everything to God and trust Him with all our heart.

'Jesus is Lord', is the shortest credal affirmation in the New Testament. Spoken by the early disciples of Jesus who had put their faith in Him. This concise statement tells us that Jesus is divine, that Jesus and God the Father are one, and that Jesus, is Sovereign, **He is Lord**. To say Jesus is Lord is also to say that **Jesus is the Messiah**, the one who saves. Matthew 16: 'Jesus asked his disciples. *'Who do you say I am?'* 16 Simon Peter answered, *'You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.'* The Apostle Paul in Romans 10:9 *If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord,"*

*and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. And **the risen Jesus is also Lord of heaven and earth**, Jesus is Lord in the here and now, in our daily lives. Jesus said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. (Matthew 28:18)*

For Jesus to be Lord of our Lives we need to know Him as He is, The Son of God and the Saviour of the World. We need to put our faith and trust in Him. Repent of our sins, the one who forgives, surrender our lives to Him, the one who gives us life, be Baptised in His name a public profession of our faith in Jesus, and our decision to follow Him. Faith in Jesus means this, nothing less, and today more than ever, we need to believe and proclaim the truth about Jesus as revealed in the Bible and the witness of the Spirit of God in our lives. The world needs us to live out our Faith in Jesus, to bear witness to Him in every aspect of our lives and proclaim his name.

And we are Baptists! Churches in the Baptist Union of which we are a part have a common statement of faith. It is called the '**Declaration of Principle**' which is made up of 3 short statements. The first of these is this:

1. That our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, God manifest in the flesh, is the sole and absolute authority in all matters pertaining to faith and practice, as revealed in the Holy Scriptures, and that each Church has liberty, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to interpret and administer His laws.
2. That Christian Baptism is the immersion in water into the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, of those who have professed repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ who 'died for our sins according to the Scriptures; was buried, and rose again the third day'.
3. That it is the duty of every disciple to bear personal witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and to take part in the evangelisation of the world.

Jesus is the sole and absolute authority in all matters pertaining to faith and practice. That is what we are saying this morning.

And Faith in Jesus is therefore a rejection of faith in all other things...if our lives are focused on other things that get in the way of us living for Jesus then we are not on the narrow path any longer. Other things, the Bible calls them idols, have stolen our heart, they have become more important to us than God himself. There are so many things that these can be and rather like Jesus teaching about 'wolves in sheep's clothing' they steal from us. We need to see these things for what they are, false god's and turn away from them.

There is so much more that we can say about Jesus, we should never stop speaking about Him, the author and perfecter of our faith. Are we able to say as Simon Peter said, "**Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.**" ⁶⁹ *We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God.* John 6: 67,68

Orthopraxis

Let us turn now to '**What we do**' (orthopraxis). How we live, in **obedience**, acting on our beliefs. There is a short parable that Jesus tells. We tell it to our children but so infrequently refer to it in adult church! It is the parable that is simple and clear to understand and full of imagery that helps us to remember it. It is the parable of **the wise and foolish builders**. Here it is in Matthew's gospel chapter 7:24-27

*"Therefore **everyone who hears these words of mine** [the teachings of Jesus] **and puts them into practice is like a wise man** who built his house on the rock. ²⁵ The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, **because it had***

its foundation on the rock. 26 But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. 27 The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash."

Jesus has just been teaching his followers, about many things. About not judging others, *Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?* He has taught them to ask God for all that they need, *Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you and your Father in heaven will give good gifts to those who ask him!*, He has taught them to enter through the narrow gate that leads to life, not the wide gate that leads to destruction. He warns them about false prophets, to be on their guard, to discern for *They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves.* And he warns them about false disciples saying *Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.*

Then he tells them that, *everyone who hears these words of mine* [the teachings of Jesus] *and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock.* Earlier, I referred to the job that I did for most of my working life prior to coming into church ministry. I was an architect and I used to work with many other construction professionals including Structural Engineers. In any building design, however exciting the new building is planned to be above ground, the most vital element of construction, is the foundations.

That is where the Structural Engineer starts his work. Understanding the ground conditions, the water courses, any history of coal mining, the influence of trees, the type and size of building to be constructed and many other factors. Everything that you see above the surface is dependent upon good foundations that are below the surface, and not seen. They have to be deep enough, wide enough and strong enough. And if you **don't** get them right the consequences for the building that is constructed on top of them can be disastrous. This is what can happen. The first sign that something is wrong is likely to be seen in cracking, internally, through wall plaster and externally through masonry. Gaps opening up as the ground beneath moves. And then the building itself moves. It is called subsidence, some of you may even have personal experience of it and know the cost and disruption of dealing with it. You can prop up the building but it will never be the same again unless you start again and rebuild from with new foundations. Of course, the very best foundation for a building is a foundation built directly on rock Like these houses.

Building our lives on 'Faith in Jesus' is the best foundation for our lives, we have to do what Jesus teaches us to do, we have to put our faith in Jesus into action through obedience. The book of James tells us to put our Faith in Jesus into action. He is direct and unambiguous, he says ...faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. Couldn't be clearer!

He gives an example to show us what he means, James 1:15-17 What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, 'Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,' but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

In the illustration of the wise and foolish builder, externally the two houses as seen above ground can look the same. Our external appearance might look fine but what is happening under the surface? What are our lives built upon?

So when we say that 'Faith in Jesus' is foundational, and 'Faith in Jesus' is our first value, we mean that if our faith is built on anything other than Jesus on His teachings, and His Saving work for humankind, we will not stand. When trouble and difficulty come in our lives, and surely they will,

'the rain will come down, the streams will rise, and the winds will blow' cracks will appear, our idols, our false god's will be of no help to us. We will try to cover up the cracks but we can't succeed because the root cause of our trouble is that we have built our lives on false hopes and untruths.

To believe is in itself an act of Faith. But as we believe or begin to believe we must then step out and exercise the faith that we have. Our faith needs to be acted upon. And as we do, we find that teachings of Jesus are right teachings to build our lives upon, that we become stronger in our faith as we live in obedience to Him, He does direct our paths, and His promise that he will be with us isn't just a comforting phrase, it becomes a lived experience of the power of God within us enabling us to do His will. To be His Disciple, to make disciples and to reveal the Kingdom of Heaven where we are.

On Easter Sunday we proclaim Jesus is Risen, He is Risen from the dead. We repeat the phrase and we say it ever more loudly, **He is Risen indeed Hallelujah.** By which we mean that Jesus died on a cross, was buried in a tomb and on the third day rose to life, he overcame death, Jesus was alive and after 40 days ascended to the Father. What we are also saying is that Jesus is still Alive today and that Jesus is alive in us! by His Holy Spirit that he has given to us. This is true not just on Easter Day but every day! We are to live by Faith in Jesus each and every day, every hour every moment. This is a living faith, not a set of rules to live by but a life captivated by the life of Jesus, by the love of Jesus that compels us to follow him, to learn from Him to know Him and to obey Him.

We don't do this alone. We grow in Faith in Jesus Together. We gather together, united in our love of Jesus, we learn together, share our gifts for the benefit of one another, become a community of God's people, hid church and work together to share the good news of Jesus with others. But I am straying into the second of our values and I will leave Ash to speak about that next Sunday.

Going Again. As we enter this autumn term we do so in circumstances that none of us have ever lived through before. We are beginning to come out of a pandemic, that so far has lasted 18 months, with the hope that we can begin to live our lives again doing the things that we love doing and meeting with our friends and loved ones, person to person. We could say well we need to 'raise our game' for the new challenges, we need to 'go again', 'go bigger', and some will want to do that and that's fine, if you are ready go for it. Or we could take some time, first reflecting on the foundations that we have built our lives on and ensuring that they are the foundations of Jesus teaching. To begin with prayer, to seek His face, to repent of sin in our lives and receive His forgiveness, to read the written word of God, the Bible and to know the living word of God, Jesus, to receive the power of the Holy Spirit and to step out in Faith again, to follow Him, and do what God directs us to do, attentive to His voice, obedient to His call.