

Faith, Hope and Love.

(preached at the 9:00am service)

Over the last three weeks we have explored a re-working of our mission statement.

Living faith

Joyful hope

Loving service.

Today is an opportunity to reflect on these characteristics.

The words faith, hope and love are heard most frequently when 1 Corinthians 13 is read out as it often is at a wedding (and sometimes at a funeral). Incidentally we will be studying 1 Corinthians 13 for 7 weeks starting next week.

The 13th chapter ends

And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

The letter to the Corinthians was written in about AD55

However the lesson we have heard read today to the Thessalonians was written 5 years before the letter to the Corinthians and St. Paul is starting to use faith, hope and love in close association with each other.

Thessalonica was the place he began his ministry and we can see he was starting to use these words and ideas there.

your work produced by faith, your labour prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

And later in the same letter he says (and he's writing to people who were pagans leading a very pagan lifestyle)

But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet.

In AD 60 St Paul is in prison in Rome and wrote his letter to the Colossian church. Unsurprisingly we find the same triplet being used

³ We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, ⁴ because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all God's people – ⁵ the faith and love that spring from the hope stored up for you in heaven and about which you have already heard in the true message of the gospel

So clearly these three words are fundamental in St. Paul's teaching and preaching and writing.

He uses them in different ways

In one place he commends the Thessalonians work and labour which spring from their faith and love.

In another faith and love are a breastplate and hope is a helmet – faith hope and love protect us.

When thinking of the Colossians he realises that it's their hope of heaven and in the Gospel that produce faith in Jesus Christ and Love for God's people

Faith, Hope and Love.

We couldn't choose three better words around which to weave our desire to fully explore what it means to live as God's people.

Faith, Hope and Love are to be hallmarks of our lives and our shared lives as a church.

These are not passive words.

We don't own faith in the same way we might own an ornament. Faith doesn't simply sit on a shelf to be looked at, it is a transforming experience that shapes our understanding of ourselves and God and the Universe. Whereas in our culture people will speak reasonably easily about having faith, or being people of faith, we are a little more direct. Our faith is in Jesus Christ. Faith is not passive and it's not woolly or general it's in Jesus Christ.

Hope is not simply an idle wish. It's the confident expectation that God is faithful to His promises and that our future is secure in him. We've been learning a new hymn at the 10:30 service and I want us to learn it to sing together here – the third verse says this

There is a hope that stands the test of time
That lifts my eyes beyond the beckoning grave
To see the matchless beauty of a day divine
When I behold His face
When sufferings cease and sorrows die
And every longing satisfied
Then joy unspeakable will flood my soul
For I am truly home

What a hope we have!!

Love can never ever be a passive word. Love is an action, it's seen and experienced. If you are going to use words to express love, you need to back them up with actions. Dr Karl Menninger said "Love cures people: the ones who receive love, and the ones who give it too."

So faith, hope and love are dynamic words shaping our living and understanding and actions. They transform our world view.

But they are also gifts.

For it is by grace you have been saved, through **faith** – and this is not from yourselves, it is the **gift of** God Ephesians 2:8

And love is a gift because while we were still sinners deserving nothing, God sent his son to die for us. This is love, God giving us himself.

And hope is the gift that springs from Christ's redeeming work, our future is transformed. Because of Christ, I have hope.

In other words we cannot manufacture faith or hope or love, but we can grow in these gifts. So if we can't make ourselves faithful, loving and hopeful – what can we do?

The answer is to experience freedom.

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free.

In our Gospel reading Jesus takes the scroll in the synagogue and reads a passage from Isaiah and then tells everyone that the prophecy is fulfilled, by himself!

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The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to set the oppressed free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.

Jesus primary work was to bring freedom.

Theologically, we are set free when we accept Jesus Christ as our Saviour. When we commit ourselves to Jesus Christ and seek forgiveness for sins, we are set free to experience all the blessings that Christ's death and resurrection gain for us leading to eternal life.

So far so good.

But the journey into full freedom is a much longer journey, it simply doesn't happen all at once.

Because of fear, or pain, or the fear OF pain, we live in the shadows content with the little we have and not experiencing all that God longs for us to have. Our experiences leave us tentative and wounded, and sad to say the church doesn't always help – it can be the cause of wounds and pain.

But so great is God's love he is always calling us to experience more and the more freedom we experience, the more we grow in faith, hope and love.

Thinking of this a guy comes to mind I shall call Dan. Looking at the practical steps of the last few years, Dan went from being completely consumed by a demanding

sales manager role, to taking a simpler job and training to be on the phones at the Samaritans, to re-arranging his finances and mortgage etc. and taking an even simpler less stressful job so that he could become a Samaritan trainer, to now having a full time job with them. He has found his vocation.

What I remember are the personal steps he took, confronting his fears, dealing with his self esteem, opening his life up to God's grace and experiencing much greater freedom and consequently growing in faith and hope and love and being able to change the life he led.

Some of those steps meant facing inner painful issues. But he got the bug for enjoying the freedom in Christ...it brings me such joy to think of it.

I want more of that freedom for myself.
I want more of that freedom for each of you.
I want much more of that freedom for the church.

I want us to have the clear hallmarks of faith, hope and love and for freedom in Christ to be the pathway along which these grow.

Possible?

Oh yes – because we have a faithful God.

(NB we concluded this talk by singing "Great is thy Faithfulness". I'll put the words here.)

Great is Thy faithfulness, O God my Father;
There is no shadow of turning with Thee,
Thou changest not, Thy compassions they fail not,
As Thou hast been, Thou forever wilt be.

Faith, Hope and Love.

Great is Thy faithfulness!

Great is Thy faithfulness!

Morning by morning new mercies I see

All I have needed Thy hand hath provided

Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord unto me!

Summer and winter and springtime and harvest,

Sun, moon, and stars in their courses above;

Join with all nature in manifold witness,

To Thy great faithfulness, mercy, and love.

Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,

Thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide;

Strength for today, and bright hope for tomorrow

Blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside.