

Sermon: Rev Susanna Pain
7/10/07

Jesus suggests his disciples do have enough faith but simply are not aware of it. Inspired by the letter to Timothy, I've chosen to write a letter to a real person who is struggling in the faith – call her Angela (not her real name). I invite you look over my shoulder as I write.

Dear Ange,

I am writing this letter to encourage you. First I want to say how I thank God for you, for your openness and your willingness to be real.

I honour your questions and your doubting. I feel privileged to hear of the journey that has led you this far, and to hear your passion. I want to talk to you a little about faith, that uncertain, adventure we are both walking. I want to encourage you to keep going – to keep being true to yourself, to keep listening to the stirring within you. You know, I believe the God who seems absent to you, is actually closer than you would suspect entwined in the questions, alongside you in your studies of the scripture, (with you as you chose not to take communion.)

Your present experience is not unusual for those of integrity. Some call it 'the dark night of the soul'. I encourage you to reflect back on what has brought you here, to today, to relive your first love, your first calling, your first inkling of God.

I also suggest you endeavour to be present in your dailyness to notice what gives you life now – be aware when you come alive, notice where your passion takes you. Discover or kindle your desire because this gives a hint of God.

And also notice what is death dealing - what deadens you?

Maybe, live a week as if God exists – and see how that is, [a week as if God doesn't exist?]

I cannot convince you of the presence of God. I can only live, listen, walk alongside you, live my faith, show you how I live, and point you to other people of faith. Watch closely, do some research. What difference does faith make to their lives? Talk with them and ask them questions.

Push hard until you are satisfied one way or another. God waits.

Let me tell you what is helpful to me – to keep praying even when I find it difficult, meditating, resting in the presence of God, saying my mantra *maranatha*, (which means come Lord, in Aramaic, the language Jesus spoke). Just being as thoughts flash through my mind, returning again and again to *maranatha*; not expecting anything, just giving the time and my heart to God. It's a discipline. I keep praying, and I visit the sick, and I call people, and I read the scripture and prepare my sermons...

I work with others to create worship services... outreach... pastoral care

I also hold paradox in my beliefs.

This is an exciting journey we are on with God, the ground at our being, our guts, our passion, with Jesus, the icon of God, the embodied love of God, and Jesus' spirit.

This week I have had many enlivening meetings. Let me tell you of some which inspired me.

The first was with Richard Browning and Nikolai Blaskow exploring our outreach to Radford College and the part of our parish that is growing exponentially in terms of new houses.

We are planning with your help Angela to hold monthly services on the last Saturday of each month at 6pm. These will be focused on children aged 4 – 12 and their families. We are planning to share a meal sometimes at 5ish then exciting, stimulating worship all together at 6 for about an hour, then children will have their interactive lesson and the adults their intellectual stimulation, then we'll all gather together to close.

We are stepping out in faith, planting a new congregation in the faith that it will grow and flourish – It is an opportunity for people to become part of another vibrant growing community of God's people. We're hoping you'll come on board – sometimes in the doing – faith ignites.

The second meeting I enjoyed this week was to discuss the possibility of holding an Arts Festival next year as part of our 40th birthday celebrations. It will be an opportunity to listen to the divine in those who create, to offer glimpses of God in music, dance, film and the visual arts, to engage with the community, (to discover – looking back and forward.), to be uplifted and inspired.

The festival will be launched at our 40th birthday at the end of July next year and possibly include an arts competition, performances, discussions and workshops over the six weeks leading up to Floriade.

It will be a celebration, an opportunity for growth and reflection, prayer and beauty, an offering to the community.

These are two very different ways of showing our faith, reaching out and serving our local community.

Are you interested in either of these, so they excite your passion? At the risk of going on, I'd like to share two other experiences of the week.

The first is Mel Clark's bible study, reading from the book of Exodus about the clash between Pharaoh and Yahweh, and the plagues – many of the deeper

meanings of the text – its thrilling to read with and sit at the feet of scholars – At Holy Covenant we are so fortunate to have Tom Frame coming in a few weeks to preach and to lead a short worship on Being Anglican.

Tom has so much history and knowledge and then this is followed up by John Painter, such a scholar, in a series of two studies on *Anglican and ...* These are rich opportunities to ask questions, to listen, to learn, to engage – the danger for me is that my faith grows flabby. I lose my sharp edge, my intellectual rigour. I learn best in community – so I hope you can join me for some of these, and maybe catch the flame, feed your ailing soul.? Or maybe you need something else? Perhaps the retreat in a fortnight entitled '*pray all ways*', a time to listen again, to be still, to walk, to soak in beauty, in the company of others. Is this what your soul deserves?

Finally, at the risk of boring you, one more glimpse of my week. On Thursday night I attended my home group. It is the second time we have met. The first time we discussed dates, meeting times, hopes, parameters, marked out an initial structure. This time we shared a simple meal, checked in – that is told how we each were travelling then two people shared their faith journeys. These were deeply moving.

One person started using visual aids – symbols of her journey and a quote from the psalms I think, '*trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding*' The other person included quotes from books he'd read including '*Learning to live finally*' by Jacques Derrider. What richness!

I was encouraged in my simple faith journey to keep walking step by step. To live this life of faith.

My love to you dear, one, I enfold you in my prayers.

Susanna

7 October 2007

Lamentations 3:22-24

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end.

They are new every morning: great is your faithfulness.

"The Lord is my portion," says my soul, "therefore I will hope in him.