Romans 4:1-11

Genesis 2:15-17, 3:1-7 26th February 2023

Both Bible readings today are about trust. If we have faith in God, that faith leads to us trusting Him.

In Genesis we heard how human beings fell from the perfect life in creation which God had planned for us. God told Adam and Eve that they should not eat the fruit from the tree of knowledge, but Adam and Eve don’t trust God in this and they disobey Him.

In our reading from St Paul’s letter to the Romans, Paul too is writing about faith and trust – faith that takes God at His word, faith that trusts in God and His promises. Paul, here, is tackling a concept that was very prevalent in his time and which is also still prevalent today; the idea that we can earn salvation, that our relationship with God can somehow be made ‘right’ by doing good deeds and be being a good person.

And St Paul is saying a definite NO to this idea – human beings are never going to be perfect in this imperfect world, we are never going to balance the scales of justice if you like, by doing good things. Salvation only comes by believing in God’s love shown through Jesus Christ, by trusting in God’s word and believing God loves us even when we don’t deserve that love. It’s a humbling idea that we cannot do it by ourselves, that we cannot earn salvation and we cannot put ourselves right with God by our own actions alone. It is only by faith, by trusting in God that we are saved. Jesus said “I am the way, the truth and the life” and our trust in those words is what our faith is about.

At the time Paul is writing, the Jewish religious leaders had built up this huge, elaborate system of laws; all these rules that a Jew had to follow in order for them to be Holy. Someone would have been considered unclean if the law wasn’t obeyed and the Pharisees at that time taught that by obeying all the rules a person could earn righteousness, could earn living in right relationship with God.

Paul knew that Jesus replaced all these laws and said there are only 2 overarching commandments – to love God and to love our neighbours as ourselves. Paul knew that it was only through Jesus’ death and resurrection that creation is put in right relationship with God.

And to argue his point, to explain these fundamental points of faith and trust, Paul writes about Abraham. Abraham was, and is, a very well known figure for the Jewish nation, he is the Father of their nation and the man to whom God made the covenant promise that the Jews would be His chosen people. Paul is explaining what it was that made Abraham so special. Abraham couldn’t have kept all these rules and laws because they didn’t exist at that time, and the Bible tells us that “Abraham trusted in God and it was accounted to him for righteousness”. The Bible doesn’t say Abraham was the cleverest, the kindness or the person who did the most good things – he could have been! But the Bible says that its Abrahams trust in God that was his righteousness.

God asks Abraham to leave everything – his home, his job and all he knows, and Abraham trusted in God and did just that – he obeyed God because he trusted Him and Abraham left everything and followed where God led him. That, writes St Paul, is faith, that is trust and that is why Abraham was a righteousness man.

AS we start this time of lent, we think of Jesus’ own temptations by the devil in the wilderness. (Luke 4) The devil tempted Jesus three times:

1. To turn stone into bread – Jesus replies that we cannot live by bread alone
2. To worship evil – Jesus replies that we should only worship God
3. He dares Jesus to jump from a huge height and be spectacularly saved – but Jesus replies we should not put God to the test.

Jesus answers are about faith and trust. Our faith needs to be nourished by the word of God, and Jesus Himself is the word made man. We should love God and worship only Him, and not the materialism and false idols of our world today. We should trust God, and so not put Him to the test.

So, how much do we trust that God loves us? And died to forgive us? Jesus put us in righteousness with God, as we could never earn that through our own actions. It is this incredible love, love which is undeserved but which nevertheless is totally ours, that we should build our lives on. We should trust in God’s love and follow Him, like Abraham did.

Finally, I’d like to add a caveat, that this doesn’t mean that we should not try and be the best people we can be – Jesus’ instructions are clear that we should love our neighbours as ourselves. Again, its about love. God loves us, we can live in righteousness with Him because of that love, and our response to being loved like this is to feel love ourselves – we feel love for God and for each other. And that love leads us to act for good as we try and follow Jesus’ teaching or example.

Perhaps a challenge this lent could be to examine how much we trust God. Often human beings reach out and trust God only after they’ve exhausted all human options – it would be much easier and better if we trusted in Him all the time.