

Sermon for Sunday 24 October 2021

I am a Liverpool fan.

I eat and drink and breath the football and the success of Liverpool Football Club. When I was very young Liverpool won everything. They became the most successful team in English history. Then they stopped winning.

In fact for most of my life they won very little. There were little blips, winning league cups and the like. Then we won a triple. Three cups in one year. It was a new start, a return to winning ways. But alas that was not the case. A few years later we won the European Cup. The best trophy in Club football. We won in the best final the competition had ever seen. Surely that was the new fresh start. The promised land of being the best again. But no.

It took nearly 30 years of my life to see Liverpool lift the Premier League trophy. To be the best in the country again. And for Liverpool to be at the top of English football (where they rightfully belong).

You are probably wondering why I am talking about football. Except that it is one of my favourite things to talk about.

The is that for nearly 30 years I never lost faith that we would finally win the league. I kept my belief in the team. I publicly wore the team colours during some pretty low years.

We see in our readings today the power of faith.

Job has had the worst possible time of things. Satan is given the chance to test Jobs faithfulness in God. Job loses his children, his animals, he suffers sores all over his body. Everyone turned against him. But still he would not curse the Lord. He was truly faithful.

Our reading today shows the reward for that faith. Job is showered in gifts from the Lord. Riches beyond belief, a large family and long life. There are plenty of theological things that can be explored in the book of Job, it really is worth studying if you get the chance. But for today I just want to look at the reward for faith. For not turning away from God.

Then we have Bartimaeus. A blind beggar. Some one who at the time would have been an outcast. To be blind was seen as a punish from God. Disabled people were shunned, they were not part of society. So when a blind beggar wants to speak to Jesus people are outraged. They ordered him to be quiet.

But Bartimaeus had faith in Jesus. He wasn't going to be quiet. He knew that Jesus could help him. So he persists. And of course Jesus helps him.

Interestingly Jesus doesn't just make him see again. He asks what Bartimaeus wants Him to do. I wonder if there is a lesson there for all of us. Never to take for granted that we know what someone needs. Never to think that we know what is best for someone else.

Jesus actually says "Your faith has made you well". Nothing else. Just faith.

Faith in Christ is what cured Bartimaeus, and faith in Christ is what will save us.

But is just having faith enough?

Did Bartimaeus just sit there being faithful. Or did he act on his faith. He went out and sought out Jesus.

We need to do the same.

To have faith in Christ is to have faith in the message that He gave us. To have faith in the Good News. To become part of that Good News.

We are required to live out our faith in the world.

Just as I showed my faith in Liverpool through all the years of losing we have to show our faith through our actions. In his second letter James writes "What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds?"

Faith demands that we live by it.

The question is how can we live by our faith. The answer, as far as I can see it is each in their own way. We are not all capable of great acts of missionary work to tribes that have never seen a European. But we might be able to talk to the lonely person at work.

We may not be able to fund a homeless shelter. But we maybe able to give a few pound a month to one.

Some of us are called to speak in public, some to speak quietly to their friends.

Even the way we live each day can be an outward sign of our inner faith. To try and be honest and fair, gentle and giving in a world that is so selfish and inward turned is a sign of being different. It is a sign of being chosen by God.

The struggle here is to make sure you are doing these things because you are living out your faith. Without the faith the works are hollow and meaningless.

You see many people that seem to do great works. But then they say that they do not believe in God. The things they do are good. They may improve the lives of many people.

But the sad truth is that their acts are still selfish. They make them feel good. They may assuage guilt that they feel. They may improve their image with others. They may just give them a warm feeling inside.

Will our works that come from faith look the same? Quite possibly. They may even make us look good. They may even give us a nice warm feeling inside. To all the world our good works might look small and meaningless. Or they may look grand and obvious.

It doesn't matter what anyone else thinks about our motivation. As long as we know that we are acting from faith. And as long as we are, God knows. That is what matters.

God will see through any deceit, even the deceit that we tell ourselves about our motivations.

To wrap everything up. We need to have faith. Without faith everything else is just window dressing. We don't have to have as much faith as Bartimaeus or Job. Even a tiny bit of faith is better than none.

Then we need to live that faith out in how we act. How we live our lives, and how we give back to the world around us.

It may not be easy. There will be times that keeping that faith alive will be more difficult. Things happen in our lives that can make us doubt. That can turn us from God. Those are the times that we as a church are there for you. Just as the crowd bring a football fan though the worst of times. So all of us, each member of the body of Christ is there for each and every other member. Again the amount that we are there will vary by each of our gifts. Some teach, some comfort. Some practise their gifts and ministries unaware of how they lift people.

We act of out Love and in faith. Love for both God and each other. Whilst we may not cheer each other on with quite same volume that 60,000 football fans do. But we should be doing it with even more conviction and even more unity.

Three words to go home with today. Faith, Works, Togetherness.

I want to end today with a simple prayer.

Lord, I offer you my hands to be your hands.
Fill my heart with a desire to serve
And my mind with the wisdom to see how.
That I might ever be your humble servant.
Amen