

## “Putting Your Faith In Jesus Christ”

Last week I talked about repentance being one of the essential ingredients in following Jesus. Making a U-Turn from sin and choosing to walk towards God rather than away from him. If you didn't get to hear that talk, then I urge you to listen to it online from the OBC website. It will help give you a context of what I'm going to say this morning. In that talk last week I said that God had a plan to deal with the way sin corrodes our relationship with God.

Sin is more than just the bad stuff we have done and keep doing in our lives. The sins we commit, are a consequence of the biggest sin, which is trying to be our own God. It doesn't work. The more we try to be our own God, the bigger the mess we make of our lives. We try to be good, but all our efforts at trying to be good end in failure. So we have this situation where we have a Holy God, who made us to be in relationship with him, but we are separated from him by this huge gap because of our sinfulness.

Imagine the whole population of the world is lined up along Mt Maunganui and Papamoa beach and we all have to swim to Australia. There are some incredibly good swimmers, some average swimmers, some very poor swimmers, and some people who just can't swim at all. So we all start off to swim to Australia. Way out in front are the very good swimmers. The very best of them have made it to 20 kilometres off the coast. Some of the average swimmers have made it 5 kilometres off the coast. The poor swimmers are only just beyond the breakers. And the ones that can't swim at all are drowning in the surf. But what does it matter? It doesn't matter if you are good, average, or poor. None of us are going to make it to Australia by swimming. If it was a morality contest, Mother Theresa would be way out front, along with Nelson Mandela and maybe Martin Luther King or some other very good person that you know. But all of them, like us, are still sinners. None of us is going to make it. The gap between sinners and a holy God is just too big. We can't get there by our own efforts.

### **The plan to deal with our sin.**

That's where God's plan comes in. Because we can't fix the problem of our sin, no matter how hard we try, God took the initiative and sent his son Jesus, to come to earth and live a sinless life as a human being. God's plan was that Jesus would take the punishment we deserved, die on a cross, and exchange his sinless life for our sinful life. He became sin for our sakes. The price of our sin is paid on the Cross. That's why all around the world, Christians regularly take communion, or as it's sometimes called, the Eucharist or the Lords supper. The bread we eat is a reminder that Jesus body was broken for us, and his blood was poured out on the ground as an offering for our sin. Being saved from sin is free to anyone who accepts it, but it isn't cheap. It cost the life of Jesus, the Son of God. When we accept what Jesus has done for us in dying on the cross, we are freed from the penalty of sin. We get to stand before a holy God as sinless as Jesus. Jesus bridges the gap between us and God. He is the only way. We can't make it through our own efforts.

The first step in becoming a follower of Jesus is repentance. Making a U-Turn from sin. Without repentance we don't even get started. The second step, is putting our faith in Jesus Christ. It means believing that he died for you and me.

That's what happened to my friend Vasili. During the cold war, when the countries in the Soviet Union were staring down the Nato nations in Europe, Vasili was a Colonel in the Bulgarian air force. He was a hot shot fighter pilot, flying the latest MIG 29 jets. He was personal friends with the leadership of Bulgaria at that time. He was at the top of his game. Fast forward 22 years. The cold war is over. The communist bloc has collapsed. Vasili is now living in Switzerland. He's lonely. He has no friends. Cancer is eating up his body. But he has two people who live next door who are kind to him. They invite him in for meals. They care for him. Their names are Alfredo and Annette Zingale. Alfredo was an Elder in our church.

In our church we used to have men's breakfasts sometimes on a Saturday morning. We used to eat all the stuff that wasn't good for you. Bacon. Eggs. Sausages. Hash browns. Lots of heart attack material, but because there were no women there to tell us we shouldn't, we got into the food with gusto. Alfredo brought Vasili along to one of these, and several of us made friends with

him. Then Alfredo asked Vasili if he would like to come with him to an Alpha course at our church. At the Alpha course, Vasili began to understand why Jesus died on the Cross. On Easter Sunday morning of 2013, Alfredo brought Vasili to church. At the end of the church service I invited people to commit to following Jesus. We had a big cross set up in the middle of the church, and Vasili came and knelt at the foot of the cross and gave his life to Christ. As he prayed, God not only freed him from all his sin, but healed his body of the cancer. Two years ago Lyn and I were back in that church in Switzerland. Who was there to greet us with a big bear hug and a huge smile was the new Vasili. Totally transformed. Full of joy. Completely changed by Jesus.

So if faith in Jesus is essential, what does that look like? Here are some characteristics of faith in Jesus Christ.

### 1. Faith has to be based on the facts of history.

Faith in faith alone is not enough. Most of us understand that. If I told you I sincerely believe that I am a brain surgeon, and I wore a white coat, and put a stethoscope in my ears, would you allow me to operate on you? Or if I put on the uniform of an airline pilot and told you I sincerely believed I can fly an Airbus A380, would you be one of my passengers? I doubt it. You would want to see some evidence that I was who I claimed to be and that I knew what I was doing as a brain surgeon or as a pilot.

Christian faith is based on objective reality, not subjective sincerity. It's based on the Biblical record of God revealing himself first to the Jewish nation, then to individuals through one Jew called Jesus. And the heart of this revelation is the claim by Jesus that he is the Son of God, sent by God the Father to be the Saviour of the world. In fact, Jesus claimed even more than that. He claimed that there is only one way to be saved, and that is through him. He said ***"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."*** (John 14:6 NIV) That is deeply offensive in an age where everyone is assumed to have some truth and no one is considered to have all truth, but that's what Jesus claimed. The message of the New Testament is that Jesus of Nazareth claimed to be the Son of God, died on a Cross for the sins of all people, and came back to life again after being dead for three days.

Putting your faith in Jesus Christ is believing that Jesus really was God. That his death on the Cross was the rescue plan of God for our sin. That he bodily rose from the dead after three days in the tomb. Faith that saves you is based on these historical events. Its based on an examination of the evidence and coming to the conclusion that Jesus was who he claimed to be. That he wasn't a con man or a lunatic, but he really was God in the flesh.

### 2. Faith has to be spoken.

The New Testament teaches us that faith has to be put into words. ***"If you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved"***. (Rom 10:9 & 10 NIV) In February 2015 a group of 21 construction workers were herded on to a beach in Libya and beheaded by Islamic state. 20 of them were Coptic Christians from Egypt. The other was from Ghana. According to some sources, the Ghanaian was not originally a Christian, but he saw the immense faith of the others, and when the terrorists asked him if he rejected Jesus, he reportedly said, "Their God is my God", knowing that he would be martyred. Over the years as a Pastor, I have baptised many people who have said they have decided to follow Jesus. One thing I have asked all of them to do, is to speak about their faith in Jesus. Some of them have found that incredibly difficult, as they are so nervous being in front of other people. But once you have spoken out your faith in Christ in front of those who are also followers of Jesus, it's not such a big step to speak it out in front of those who don't believe in him.

### 3. Faith has to be continual.

Real faith in Christ goes on trusting, even when the going gets tough. It's not how you start in the Christian life, it's how you finish. It's not how high you jump, but how straight you walk afterwards. John Chapter 3:16 is probably the most well known verse in the New Testament. ***"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life"***. (John 3:16 NIV) In the original language that word "believe" is in a

continuous tense. It's talking about the person who **keeps on** believing who will not perish but have eternal life. The world is full of "used to be" Christians. People who started out following Jesus but for some reason stopped following. Sometimes it's because they got hurt by other Christians. Sometimes it's because they went through some traumatic experience and they felt that God wasn't there for them. Sometimes it's because they just drifted away from Jesus, not because of some conscious decision, but because other things in life became more important than Jesus. Perhaps some of you that are here today are like that. I need to tell you it's not too late to get back to where you used to be. If we as a church can help you do that we would be glad to walk that journey back with you.

#### 4. Faith must be personal.

Becoming a follower of Jesus means just that – following him. He takes us on an adventure and we often don't know where that leads. Faith in Christ is not about agreeing to a set of propositions or accepting that the teaching of Christianity is true. It's more personal than that. It's getting out of the driver's seat and letting Jesus take over.

One of my favourite descriptions about following Jesus comes from Tim Hansell. This is what he writes;

"At first I saw God as my observer, my judge, keeping track of the things I did wrong, so as to know whether I merited heaven or hell when I die. He was out there, sort of like the president. I recognized His picture when I saw it, but I really didn't know him. But later on when I met Christ, it seemed as though life were rather like a bike ride, but it was a tandem bike, and I noticed that Christ was in the back helping me pedal. I don't know just when it was that He suggested that we change places, but life has not been the same since. When I had control, I knew the way. It was rather boring but predictable ... It was the shortest distance between two points. But when He took the lead, He knew delightful long cuts, up mountains, and through rocky places at breakneck speeds, and it was all I could do to hang on! Even though it looked like madness, He said, "Pedal." I worried and was anxious and asked, "Where are You taking me?" He laughed and didn't answer, and I started to learn to trust. I forgot my boring life and entered into the adventure. And when I said, "I'm scared," He'd lean back and touch my hand. He took me to people with gifts that I needed, gifts of healing, acceptance, and joy. They gave me gifts to take on my journey, my Lord's and mine. And we're off again. He said, "Give the gifts away, they're extra baggage, too much weight." So I did, to the people we met, and I found that in giving I received, and still our burden was light. I did not trust Him at first, to be in control of my life, I thought He would wreck it; But He knows bike secrets, knows how to make it bend to take sharp corners, knows how to jump to clear high rocks, knows how to fly to shorten scary passages. I'm learning to shut up and pedal in the strangest places, and I'm beginning to enjoy the view and the cool breeze on my face with my delightful constant companion, Jesus Christ. And when I'm sure I just can't do anymore, He smiles and says ... "Pedal."

Jesus invites every one of us to put our faith in him. He once said ***"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."*** (John 10:10 NIV). He invites us on this amazing adventure. Instead of being dead in our sin, we become alive in Christ. No matter who you are, where you have been, what you have done, or where you are at now, this invitation of Jesus is to you. If you have never put your faith in Him before, but want to today, he will meet with you, just as he did with my friend Vasili. If you once followed him, but have wandered away from him, he will be there to pick up the journey where you left off.

We have a prayer corner over at this side of the church. I'm going to ask that some of the staff and some of the elders of the church come and sit over there after the service is over. If you would like someone to pray for you, someone will be there to pray with you. Or you may like to come with a friend and ask them to pray with you.

**Prayer.**