

The Christian Faith – a series of 5 sermons on the 5 vows of the Church of Scotland that was given by Martin Pearce, Locum Reader at St Nicholas Church Sighthill, during October and November 2014.

The sermons state what the Christian believes and where the evidence is in the Holy Bible to support such beliefs that leads to the 5 vows .

References and Acknowledgments:

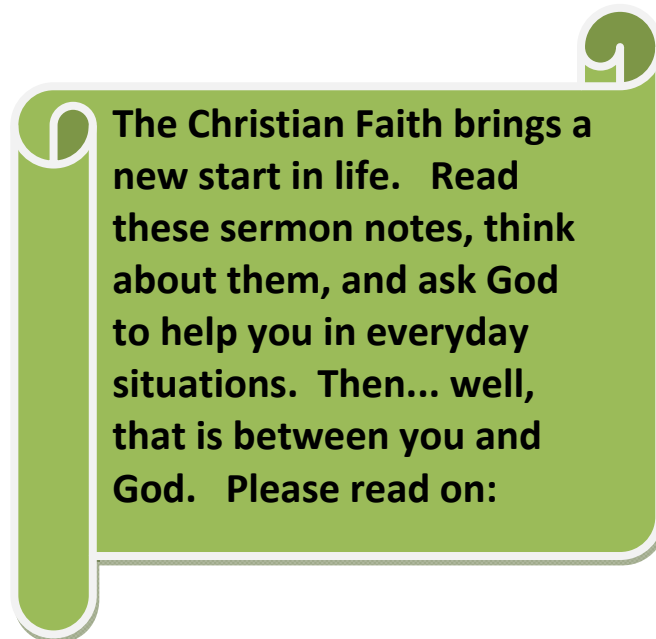
To prepared these sermon notes, I relied heavily on a book written by Reverend Jeremy Middleton called Coming Alive, which I have used regularly over the last 20 years to a number of enquirers into the Christian Faith and for those people who wish to review their vows again.

In addition, I have used reference material from Christianity Explored and the Alpha Course.....and I have relied on John Stott's Bible Speaks Today Bible Commentaries for many key points in these notes.

Martin Pearce

Locum at St Nicholas Sighthill Edinburgh

14th February 2015



God loved the world so much that He gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him may not die but have eternal life. (John3:16)

St Nicholas Church

Sunday 26th October 2014:

The Christian Faith – Vow 1

Vow 1: I believe in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit; and I confess Jesus Christ as my saviour and Lord.

Jeremiah 32:33 & John 3: 3 to 17

The Jeremiah reading is just one example of how the Old Testament looks forward to the new covenant – a new agreement between God and his people – and that could only happen once the messiah, the Christ, the anointed one came.....And when Jesus came, he changed people's hearts....

The second reading is where we listen into the conversation between Nicodemus and Jesus.

Nicodemus epitomises the apparently perfect Pharisee.....who knew the scriptures from Jeremiah and the Torah...the writing of Moses – a highly educated man of notable status in the Jewish council known as the Sanhedrin.

But Nicodemus struggled to understand this new prophet and teacher called Jesus.....because Jesus made some amazing statements and left Nicodemus bewildered but fascinated by Jesus' answers.....which is why we meet Nicodemus again later in Scripture on the day of Jesus' crucifixion – what we call Good Friday – when the body of Christ was taken down from the cross because Nicodemus was ready to help look after the body.....

Jeremiah 31:33 Good News Translation (GNT)

³³ The new covenant that I will make with the people of Israel will be this: I will put my law within them and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.

John 3:3-17 Good News Translation (GNT)

³ Jesus answered, "I am telling you the truth: no one can see the Kingdom of God without being born again."

⁴ "How can a grown man be born again?" Nicodemus asked. "He certainly cannot enter his mother's womb and be born a second time!"

⁵ "I am telling you the truth," replied Jesus, "that no one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit. ⁶ A person is born physically of human parents, but is born spiritually of the Spirit. ⁷ Do not be surprised because I tell you that you must all be born again. ⁸ The wind blows wherever it wishes; you

hear the sound it makes, but you do not know where it comes from or where it is going. It is like that with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

⁹ “How can this be?” asked Nicodemus.

¹⁰ Jesus answered, “You are a great teacher in Israel, and you don't know this? ¹¹ I am telling you the truth: we speak of what we know and report what we have seen, yet none of you is willing to accept our message. ¹² You do not believe me when I tell you about the things of this world; how will you ever believe me, then, when I tell you about the things of heaven? ¹³ And no one has ever gone up to heaven except the Son of Man, who came down from heaven.”^[c]

¹⁴ As Moses lifted up the bronze snake on a pole in the desert, in the same way the Son of Man must be lifted up, ¹⁵ so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. ¹⁶ For God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not die but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to be its judge, but to be its saviour.

MESSAGE

My hope and prayer in preparing this series of 5 sermons is that everyone reading these notes will feel that their faith has been reinforced and that your faith is better able to cope with the knocks, disappointments and sadness that we all suffer from time to time.

It is always good for us to be willing and ready to say what we actually believe.

Often, we are challenged to explain our Christian Faith to a family member or neighbour when we least expect it.

And if there are people here with doubts about whether there is a supernatural God, a living Jesus, and a Holy Spirit then my prayer is that our readings and our understanding of scripture over these 5 sermon notes will help you to become stronger in faith, and to cope with such doubts.

It is of course natural to feel depressed when we listen to the news from around the world or read our newspapers or I Phones.

And at the personal level, how do we cope with all the problems and challenges that we face day by day, the problems of relationships, unemployment, debt, dwindling pensions, the anxiety we have about health of our loved ones and sometimes ourselves, our concern about the education of our children, and grandchildren and the need to address housing and social problems for many people in our city and so on.

The answer is that practising Christians counter the bad news with the Good News of Jesus – which means having new life in responding to Jesus:

where hope replaces despair,

where an inner peace replaces turmoil,

where fulfilment replaces failure, and God replaces self at the centre of our hearts.

Hence we have new Life.

Practising Christians also become **a new family**: the church is a family – a group of people who believe distinctive things about Jesus.

They are all ages, all personalities, all races, - a world-wide family.....

We become a new person when we accept the Christian faith – we change - we do not go on as before,

We behave differently..... yes it may take time.... yes it may be hard but if we listen to God's word and take the Holy Spirit into our hearts, we do change.....

Becoming a Christian or renewing our vows is like a new start – because everything centres on Jesus, he can make us alive, he can make us belong, he can help us to behave, and therefore give us new life, and new attitudes.

In our second reading John 3: 14 Nicodemus is challenged in a way he had never been challenged before despite his religious knowledge and status.

To enter God's kingdom means a radical new beginning.

Jesus offers eternal life.....the old cycle of physical birth and death is over.

Eternal life involves something which can only be described as re-birth, i.e. being born of the Holy Spirit.

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.....

How did Nicodemus react to thathe was amazed, staggered and deeply troubled.....so much so that we find Nicodemus following Jesus all the way to his crucifixion.....

More importantly, how do we react to these words in John Chapter 3 verse 16?

Does it give us confidence that when we pass through the door called death that life is not at the end.....?

But God does not just throw words at us or expect us to be inspired by people of faith; he gives us real help.....

Jesus said, just before being taken into heaven, that he would give us a helper.....

(Acts1 verse 4)

“Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. ⁵ For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.

Hence the Church of Scotland's first vow is as follows:

First Vow: I believe in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit; and I confess Jesus Christ as my saviour and Lord.

At the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit visited the Apostles and followers of Christ, and they spoke in tongues and were anointed by the flames.

Peter explained who Christ was to the several thousand or more followers who gathered at Pentecost by saying:

(Reading 2: Acts 2: 22 to 24) Fellow Israelites, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by **miracles**, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. ²³ This man was handed over to you by God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge; and you, with **the help of wicked men,**^[a] **put him to death** by nailing him to the cross. ²⁴ But God **raised him from the dead**, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was **impossible for death to keep its hold on him.**

And so what, we say, what difference does it make to us in our 21st Century world?

Let's listen to Peter's instructions as we read again from Acts 2:**V38-39**

Repent and be baptised, every one of you in the name of Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off – for whom the Lord our God will call.'

And that is what we are invited to do in order to be put right with God..... And if our relationship with God is right, then our relationships with our families, friends, and neighbours will, in time, become right.

God has given us free choice. We are not robots,

If we choose to have no relationship with God and go our own ways, then do not be surprised if the burdens of life become too much to bare.....your faith is part of the way of dealing with every situation.....it is part of the solution when coping with all the challenges we face of failing health or anxieties or bereavement or whatever.....

Peter tells the people and therefore us that they are to receive 2 free gifts:

The forgiveness of sins, and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

God placed no limitation on these two gifts – it was not just for the apostles or his followers, these gifts are for everyone..... including us..... for people who live in your Parish, in your community and family.....

What a wonderful promise God has made to us all.

For God did not send his Son into the world to be its judge, but to be its saviour. (John 3: 17)

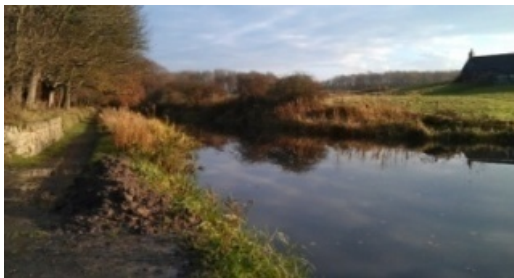
Be encouraged, we worship a loving God, a God who loves each and everyone of us.....a living Jesus who does remarkable things through ordinary people like you and me by giving us the Holy Spiritwhen we turn to him and can truly say:

First Vow: I believe in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit; and I confess Jesus Christ as my saviour and Lord.

Let's conclude by saying together if you wish – aloud or silently to God:

I believe in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit; and I confess Jesus Christ as my saviour and Lord.

Amen



“Knowing that I have Jesus as my Saviour is the greatest gift of all”

Be encouraged, we worship a loving God, a God who loves each and every one of us.....a living Jesus who does remarkable things through ordinary people like us, by giving us the Holy Spirit.

Jesus is someone we can trust, who loves us through the ups and downs of life.

St Nicholas Church

Sunday 26th October 2014:

The Christian Faith – Vow 2

Vow 2: We promise to join regularly with our fellow Christians in worship on the Lord's Day.

Readings: Mark 4: 35-41 & 1 Corinthians 15: 1-11

Mark 4: 35-41 Jesus Calms a Storm

³⁵ On the evening of that same day Jesus said to his disciples, "Let us go across to the other side of the lake." ³⁶ So they left the crowd; the disciples got into the boat in which Jesus was already sitting, and they took him with them. Other boats were there too. ³⁷ Suddenly a strong wind blew up, and the waves began to spill over into the boat, so that it was about to fill with water. ³⁸ Jesus was in the back of the boat, sleeping with his head on a pillow. The disciples woke him up and said, "Teacher, don't you care that we are about to die?"

³⁹ Jesus stood up and commanded the wind, "Be quiet!" and he said to the waves, "Be still!" The wind died down, and there was a great calm. ⁴⁰ Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Why are you frightened? Do you still have no faith?"

⁴¹ But they were terribly afraid and began to say to one another, "Who is this man? Even the wind and the waves obey him!"

1 Corinthians 15: 1-11 The Resurrection of Christ

15 And now I want to remind you, my friends, of the Good News which I preached to you, which you received, and on which your faith stands firm. ² That is the gospel, the message that I preached to you. You are saved by the gospel if you hold firmly to it—unless it was for nothing that you believed.

³ I passed on to you what I received, which is of the greatest importance: that Christ died for our sins, as written in the Scriptures; ⁴ that he was buried and that he was raised to life three days later, as written in the Scriptures; ⁵ that he appeared to Peter and then to all twelve apostles. ⁶ Then he appeared to more than five hundred of his followers at once, most of whom are still alive, although some have died. ⁷ Then he appeared to James, and afterward to all the apostles.

⁸ Last of all he appeared also to me—even though I am like someone whose birth was abnormal. ⁹ For I am the least of all the apostles—I do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted God's church. ¹⁰ But by God's grace I am what I am, and the grace that he gave me was not without effect. On the contrary, I have worked harder than any of the other apostles, although it was not really my own doing, but God's grace working with me. ¹¹ So then, whether it came from me or from them, this is what we all preach, and this is what you believe.

Sermon:

Our first reading is a nature miracle where Jesus calms the storm.....the story carries clear signs of eye witness accounts.

There is the stark language: Teacher don't you care if we drown? Followed by Jesus reply – Do you still have no faith?

Added to all this there is the reference to other boats being there....unnecessary point of details since they play no further part in the story.....but of course the implications is that there are other eye witnesses who saw Jesus calm the storm.....

The problem we have with this nature miracle is we start from the premise that no human can do such miracles so Jesus could not have done so.

There are 9 nature miracles (Jesus calming the storm is in 3 gospels). The most well known miracle is the feeding of the 5000, which is the only miracle that appears in all 4 gospels).

And there are 23 detailed healing miracles (of which 8 are detailed in 3 of the Gospels)

And there are 3 miracles of bringing the dead back to life miracles (Jairus daughter, Widow's son at Nain, Lazarus) – apart from the resurrection of Jesus.

And hence Jesus demonstrated remarkable power.....and remember, scripture tells us in several places that all that Jesus did could not be recorded at the time because no one could write it all down.....

We are left with the evidence that Jesus had remarkable powers.....

Fact 1: He performed miracles.

So what other attributes did Jesus have that made him different?

Secondly, he made amazing claims.....the following are examples from the Gospel of John.

1. Bread

I am the bread of life," Jesus told them. "Those who come to me will never be hungry; those who believe in me will never be thirsty." *John 6:35*

2. Light

¹² Jesus spoke to the Pharisees again. “I am the light of the world,” he said. “Whoever follows me will have the light of life.” *John 8:12*

3. Gate

I am the gate. Those who come in by me will be saved; they will come in and go out and find pasture. *John 10:9*

4. Good Shepherd

“I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for His sheep.” *John 10:11*

5. Resurrection and Life

Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me will live, even though they die; *John 11:25*

6. Way, Truth, Life

Jesus answered him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one goes to the Father except by me. *John 14:6*

7. True vine

15 “I am the real vine, and my Father is the gardener. *John 15:1*

The divinity of Jesus Christ is further illustrated in *John 8:58*. Jesus said,

“Truly, Truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am”, which means that Jesus existed before His human life on earth.

C S Lewis responded to these claims and miracles by saying.....

And so we are left with a mad man who has got carried away with his own ego who should have been locked up for his own safety or he is magician – hence he can do these remarkable miracles.....or he is who he said he was, the Son of God.....

“Paraphrased from Mere Christianity by C S Lewis”

C S Lewis also wrote: But let us not come up with patronising nonsense about Jesus being a great teacher. He has not left that explanation open to us. He did not intend to.

And hence our Second Fact: Jesus made amazing claims.....

And there are more Facts about Jesus,

Fact 3 is he lived with perfect purity..... or did he?

Let's challenge that claim for a moment?

When did Jesus do something wrong...when did he commit sin?

Difficult isn't it.....in today's media, he would have probably been accused of being a trouble maker.....but was he?.....All he did was to offer unconditional love and forgiveness to all who listened...and a true interpretation of scripture.

And Jesus offered new life and eternal life.....no one else could make such an offer.....he did not lose his temper.....yes he over-turned the tables in the temple because the money changers had turn the temple in to a den of thieves.....but he did not preach violence to over turn the Roman occupation or anything like that.....

Hebrews 4: 15 Our High Priest is not one who cannot feel sympathy for our weaknesses. On the contrary, we have a High Priest who was tempted in every way that we are, but did not sin.

And so our 3rd Fact about Jesus is he lived with perfect purity.....

The authority of Jesus is our 4th Fact.

When Jesus taught – people were impressed by the sheer authority which he spoke.....there was something quite unique about.....Jesus.

Matthew 7:28-29 when Jesus finished saying these things, the crowd was amazed at the way he taught. ²⁹ He wasn't like the teachers of the Law; instead, he taught with authority.

John 7 32 -46 – The chief priest sent his guards to arrest Jesus but the guards come back frighten of arresting Jesus because there would have been a riot and they said:

⁴⁶ **The guards answered, “Nobody has ever talked the way this man does!”**

Fact 4: Jesus spoke with unique authority

**And so to our last fact: Fact 5: Jesus died and rose again
and was seen by many people.**

Paul gave us a list of people who saw the risen Christ (**1 Corinthians 15: 1 to 11**) and they are:

- 1. Peter, (also mentioned in Luke)**
- 2. the Twelve, (which must have included Matthias who replaced Judas)**
- 3. 500 of the brothers at the same time,**
- 4. James (who theologians believe was the Lord's brother and not James the Apostle)**
- 5. The Apostles, who as far as Paul was concerned, included more than the 12.**
- 6. And last of all, he appeared to Saul, who was later called Paul, on the road to Damascus.**

And here are 6 more appearances of the risen Jesus from the Gospels:

1. Mary Magdalene at the open tomb
2. Cleopas and his companion on the walk to Emmaus on Easter Day
3. The disciples and followers in the house in Jerusalem that evening when Thomas was absent.
4. Thomas and the disciples one week later
5. The 7 fishermen in the boat at Galilee (John 21)
6. The ascension into heaven

And the question we are left with is how many of these 12 appearances does it take for us to believe that Jesus was in fact resurrected on Easter Day?

And we also know that the evidence of history supports the fact that Jesus rose from the dead.

The transformation of the disciples of Jesus is perhaps the greatest evidence of all for the resurrection.

The men of the gospels are new and different men in the Acts. They are no longer disciples, they are Apostles!

The death of their Master left them despondent, disillusioned, and in despair. But in the Acts they emerged as men who risk their lives for the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and who turned the world upside down. And there were also a number of women who turned to Christ and were empowered by the Holy Spirit.

On Easter Sunday morning Jesus demonstrated victory over death and offered us new life in this world and in the world to come.

From the right hand of God, Jesus speaks to every one of us today and invites us to ever lasting life:

I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?" (John 11:25–26)

Jesus answered him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one goes to the Father except by me. (John 14: 6)

And hence we need to worship God, sense his love and presence, enjoy fellowship with one another to and accept God's forgiveness and love. **But to do that we need to go to church.....or worship with our fellow Christians regularly in other ways.....**

And so to our second vow, which you are invited to say aloud or silently as you wish.

Christian faith Vow 2: We promise to join regularly with our fellow Christians in worship on the Lord's Day. Amen

"When Christians meet together I am reminded of a fire – but when a piece of coal falls into the hearth, it does not continue to burn, the warmth, heat and light slowly die away. So it is important to me that I worship with others on a regular basis to keep the flame burning."



St Nicholas Sighthill Parish Church
Sermon: Sunday 16th November 2014:
Third Christian Faith Vow
Vow 3: I promise to be faithful in reading the Bible, and in prayer.

1 Corinthians 15:19-23

¹⁹ If our hope in Christ is good for this life only and no more, then we deserve more pity than anyone else in all the world.

²⁰ But the truth is that Christ has been raised from death, as the guarantee that those who sleep in death will also be raised. ²¹ For just as death came by means of a man, in the same way the rising from death comes by means of a man. ²² For just as all people die because of their union with Adam, in the same way all will be raised to life because of their union with Christ. ²³ But each one will be raised in proper order: Christ, first of all; then, at the time of his coming, those who belong to him.

1 John 4:7-11 God Is Love

⁷ Dear friends, let us love one another, because love comes from God. Whoever loves is a child of God and knows God. ⁸ Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. ⁹ And God showed his love for us by sending his only Son into the world, so that we might have life through him. ¹⁰ This is what love is: it is not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the means by which our sins are forgiven.

¹¹ Dear friends, if this is how God loved us, then we should love one another.

Sermon:

From the start of their new lives, the disciples of Jesus proclaimed that the good news had its very heart in the death that Jesus died on the cross but was risen from death.

But why did he die?

He died unjustly.....he had done nothing wrong.

He died purposefully - Jesus stressed through his preaching that not only would he die, but that as the promised Saviour he must die.

Nothing less than his death would he accomplish the salvation that had been promised throughout the Old Testament by God.

It was to bring that promise to fruition and make it a reality that Jesus died.

He died willingly.....he had to show total credibility with all people.....

Jesus has total credibility - he went through all human rejection and suffering and can look anyone in the eye, and say to us today,

I know how you feel. I went through the same pain during my arrest, trial, beatings, and crucifixion. My family were asylum seekers, my father died early in my life, and my brothers and sisters rejected me for a long time....and the establishment could not cope with my teachings of scripture.....and when I was brought up, we lived under Roman occupation.

Yes I know the world is tough and unfair..... but that is because God gave all people freewill and some choose to live life in selfish and self-centred ways pursuing wealth, health and power at all costs and treat people with less respect than animals..... but these are transient concepts, none last for ever.....but I am the God of yesterday, today and tomorrow. I will always be here, and always ready to welcome you into my arms.

What does dying on the cross mean?

1 John 4: 7 says:

⁷ Dear friends, let us love one another, because love comes from God. Whoever loves is a child of God and knows God. ⁸ Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. ⁹ And God showed his love for us by sending his only Son into the world, so that we might have life through him

This is the way we are to live.....

This is the God we are to trust

We all know that no one is perfect.

We all fall short of the standards of God.

We sometimes do our own thing, in our own ways, ignoring God's teachings and unconditional love.

But Jesus has shown us how to live the life of obedience and hence human sin has been forgiven by God if we show obedience to Him by following the example of Jesus.

Forgiveness is open to all people, if they turn to Jesus by repenting their sins.....saying they are truly sorry for their failings to one another and to God.....but they have to mean it.....

And if our relationship is right with God, then our relationships with one another and within our families improve over time.....

And so we get to the stage in life, where we can willingly accept God's forgiveness and unconditional love and try to treat other people in the same way that we expect to be treated ourselves.

How should we respond ?

We should face future with love. Face the future with hope, and accept an inner peace that only God can give you.

And surprisingly, we can face death with joy knowing that through Jesus our saviour there is life after we pass through the door called death.....

yes the dying process is painful - to see a love one suffer the effects of failing minds and bodies and to experience such failing health ourselves.....but we know that through Jesus, death is not the end of life.....

The Apostles including Paul demonstrated remarkable courage in the face of all adversities after Jesus' ascension into heaven (e.g. Acts 27:22)

Courage is not the absence of fear, but the ability to go on in spite of it..... it takes courage to cope with local teenagers causing much noise and disruption as they run around the blocks of flat at night.....but if you have faith in Jesus, then you can cope with such fears.

The Apostles had a sense of purpose(Acts 27:23)

i.e., to live for Christ and in Christ, and then they could cope with all the storms in life.....

How many people have a real sense of purpose in life.....how often do you hear people say.....they are just drifting in life.....and their lives are rudderless.....or depend upon wealth or success or buying the latest fashion to make themselves feel good.

The Apostles could sense the PRESENCE of God (Acts 27:25)

The Apostles knew the heart and character of God. They trusted God to do what He said that He would do. If we are to exhibit wisdom then we too should trust in God.....

Does it matter how we respond????

Yes it does....we are either for him or against him....being indifferent to Christ is the same as being against him.....

And depending upon that response, we will either be with him in heaven or without him.....dead.....we may not like it.....but the bible is very clear, there is life after death, if we die in faith.....

The Good News of the Gospel is that we are forgiven by God when we turn to Jesus for new life.....and we can look forward to life after death.

And so scripture encourages us to be faithful in reading the Bible, and in prayer.

You will be amazed how your life changes for the better and how you can cope with all matters, and this leads to our third vow :

Vow 3: I promise to be faithful in reading the Bible, and in prayer.

It is only spending time reflecting on God's word and in prayer, can we change and grow in faith as individuals and as a church family. In the time we have for a sermon or message, we can only quote a few scripture readings....but regular time in reading scripture and in prayer....that nurtures your soul....

And as we progress through the 5 vows of the Christian Faith, come to Jesus now, in perhaps a way you have never done so before.

Put your life in the hands of Jesus.

Come back to Him if you feel that you have drifted away from him and His Church.....Allow His love and teachings to secure you in the storms of life by reading the Bible and spending time in prayer.....and remember the most effective prayers are often the silent ones.....Amen.



“The Word of the Lord in the Bible is a vital guide for life that sustains me every day. In prayer, I have a living, close relationship with God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.”

I am the God of yesterday, today and tomorrow. I will always be here, and always ready to welcome you into my arms.

St Nicholas Church
Sunday 23rd November 2014:
The Christian Faith – Vow 4
Vow 4 Service: We promise to give a fitting proportion
of our time, talents, and money for the Church's work in the world.

Romans 12: v1 to 21 Life in God's service

V1: So then, my friends, because of God's great mercy to us I appeal to you: Offer yourselves as a living sacrifice to God, dedicated to his service and pleasing to him. This is the true worship that you should offer.² Do not conform yourselves to the standards of this world, but let God transform you inwardly by a complete change of your mind. Then you will be able to know the will of God—what is good and is pleasing to him and is perfect.

Paul presents us as priestly people, who in response to God, are told by Paul to offer our bodies in our service.

In other words, our service involves acts of physical work by our bodies –faith **is not** just about changing our hearts and minds.

Paul has stressed in the earlier chapters of Romans that salvation is a gift from God that no earthly act earns, because we all fall short of the glory of God.

Nevertheless we are expected to use our bodies in the service of God. Just in the same way we are to think differently, once we accept God's gift of forgiveness and salvation.

So you see Paul is saying we have to be transformed, not just in the way we think, but also in the way we serve others in Christ's service.

Paul having spoken about the body in verses 1 and 2 explains in verses 3 to 8 the need for a renewed mind, which is capable of discerning God's will.

A renewed mind is a humble mind like Christ (V3).

Paul draws on the analogy of the body and the Christian community. Paul says that we are all **parts** of the same body but we all have different functions.

That means we are dependent on one another, and our Christian fellowship is enhanced by the diversity of our gifts.

This metaphor of the human body, which Paul develops in different ways in different letters in the New Testament, enables him here to hold together the unity of the church. Paul proceeds to give his readers a sample of seven gifts:

Speaking gifts of prophesying, teaching, encouraging, and service gifts of serving, contributing, leading, and showing mercy.

Just stop and think for a moment: what are the gifts that you have been given by God, and to what extent to you use them to build up our worldwide Christian family..... And let's give thanks to God to the people here for their Christian service and their examples.

And the last part of Paul's reading today deals with our relationship to one another,

Agape love now dominates his writings.

So far in Romans all references of agape love have been to the love of God: God demonstrated his love for us by allowing Jesus to die on the cross for our sins.

But Paul now focuses on agape as the essence of Christian discipleship.

Love must be sincere.....i.e. without hypocrisy.

The exhortation to love is immediately followed by the instruction to hate what is evil. (Verse 9).

Love is not a blind sentiment but it is discerning. Hate what is evil but love what is good we are told. The church must be a force for good, hence it must be able to discern between what to love and what to hate.

Be devoted to one another in brotherly and sisterly love we are told in verse 10 – in this way the church family will grow.

New people visiting a church need to feel a warm welcome and sense that love prevails throughout the church family..... Everyone is welcomed, everyone belongs, everyone is loved and respected.

Where Christian love is strong, among everyone, then the church family is welcoming and the church grows.

Work hard and do not be lazy. Serve the Lord with a heart full of devotion. says Paul in verse 11.

In UK, people run out of faith they say, they get worn down by life's troubles and failing health. But Paul says, never lack enthusiasm..... to maintain your enthusiasm we need our worship to be uplifting through our music and singing, and our worship needs to bring an inner peace through prayers and the understanding of scriptures.

Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, and faithful in prayer. This is the way to maintain enthusiasm for Christ.

Verse 12 states the need for practical hospitality – the coffee after the service is an example of where hospitality brings people together and all are welcome..... even better, invite one another home for lunch..... Particularly visitors.....

And we are told by Paul on how to put love into action:

V14: Ask God to bless those who persecute you—yes, ask him to bless, not to curse.¹⁵ Be happy with those who are happy, weep with those who weep.¹⁶ Have the same concern for everyone. Do not be proud, but accept humble duties.¹⁷ Do not think of yourselves as wise.

Good practical advice. Easy to say, hard to do.....

Paul continues in verse 17 with more practical advice.....

If someone has done you wrong, do not repay him with a wrong. Try to do what everyone considers to be good.¹⁸ Do everything possible on your part to live in peace with everybody.¹⁹ Never take revenge, my friends, but instead let God's anger do it.

Hence our 4th Vow is: We promise to give a fitting proportion of our time, talents, and money for the Church's work in the world.

Amen.



“I have no hope of fulfilling this promise in my own strength. Accepting the freely-given love, forgiveness and guidance of God, Father Son and Holy Spirit, can help me to change. I am a work in progress.”

Christians have freewill to develop their faith. People need to sense God's love and to know Jesus to cope with the storms of life. Faith in Jesus is for every day in life.

St Nicholas Church

Sunday 30th November 2014:

The Christian Faith 5 – Vow 5

Fifth Vow: I promise, depending upon the grace of God, to confess Christ before men, to serve him in my daily work, and to walk His ways all the days of my life.

Introduction:

In our first reading, the prophet Isaiah powerfully brings together two realities that remain constant points of reference in our worship: our estranged condition on the one hand and the constancy of God as Creator and Father on the other.

Analysis of the human condition by Isaiah in today's reading is not very encouraging: people are sinful, people do not turn to God in prayer, and no one seeks help from God.....remember this is being recorded roughly 700 years Before Christ.....Have we not heard such statements made today about our community.....

And yet the images in our first reading show that Isaiah knows that God has infinite power and there is no God like the God of the Jews.

The cry of the poor, in desperation, often appeals for help with a fond imagination that there is something of a parent-child relationship that can be invoked. Isaiah appeals to God as Father.

God is indeed "the potter" who has made us and has shaped our life and destiny. Greater still is our confidence when we follow Jesus, knowing God as "Abba, Father".

No matter how much is stacked against us, we know that God has purposes for us on which we can always depend, because he is shaping us today at St Nicholas and elsewhere just as he did all those years ago in Isaiah's time.

And our second reading from Matthew needs no introduction other than to say, it is known as the Great Commission.

Isaiah 64:1-9 Good News Translation (GNT)

64 Why don't you tear the sky open and come down? The mountains would see you and shake with fear. ² They would tremble like water boiling over a hot fire. Come and reveal your power to your enemies, and make the nations tremble at your presence! ³ There was a time when you came and did terrifying things that we did not expect; the mountains saw you and shook with fear. ⁴ No one has ever seen or heard of a God like you, who does such deeds for those who put their hope in him. ⁵ You welcome those who find joy in doing what is right, those who remember how you want them to live. You were angry with us, but we went on sinning; in spite of your great anger we have continued to do wrong since ancient times. ⁶ All of us have

been sinful; even our best actions are filthy through and through. Because of our sins we are like leaves that wither and are blown away by the wind. ⁷ No one turns to you in prayer; no one goes to you for help. You have hidden yourself from us and have abandoned^[b] us because of our sins.

⁸ But you are our father, LORD. We are like clay, and you are like the potter. You created us, ⁹ so do not be too angry with us or hold our sins against us forever. We are your people; be merciful to us.

Matthew 28: 16-20

¹⁶ The eleven disciples went to the hill in Galilee where Jesus had told them to go.

¹⁷ When they saw him, they worshiped him, even though some of them doubted.

¹⁸ Jesus drew near and said to them, "I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. ¹⁹ Go, then, to all peoples everywhere and make them my disciples: baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teach them to obey everything I have commanded you. And I will be with you always, to the end of the age."

Sermon:

Today we turn to our 5th and final vow, which is as follows:

I promise, depending on the grace of God, to profess publicly our loyalty to Jesus Christ, to serve him in our daily work, and to walk in his ways all the days of our lives.

The days of Christians hiding their faith in the UK need to change now because so many of our churches are below critical mass...meaning there are insufficient people to keep them going as places of worship.....it is the people we need to focus on..... God is restructuring the church today.....and during this period of uncertainty people need to sense God's love and to know Jesus to cope with the storms of life and to prepare for the next life.....and they need to know that the Christian Faith is relevant in their every day situations.

So here are some thoughts, which we have been discussing during the locum meetings in the vestry...the meetings with the Navigator leaders.....the meetings with the Christmas communications team, and the worship and prayer teams.....

Be real: We can speak from first hand experiences of how God has helped us through the ups and downs of life.

Be honest. There are times when God does seem far away, particularly when sudden misfortune or a serious illness or bereavement threatens to overwhelm us.....but if we speak to God every day then we will always sense his comforting presence.....and he will be there in the storms of life, and share our pain and disappointments but He will help us to cope and to recover our spirit.....

Be respectful.....if people do not come to church....or when you are visiting as elders or on a pastoral visit, don't give up on them.....keep trying.....most people are actually not apathetic towards the Christian Faith.....they know little about the Christian Faith if they are under 40.....

and the few who think about it, are frightened that there might be something in it and they are embarrassed that their behaviour and attitudes are far away from God.....they fear being condemned.....we have to offer our love, forgiveness, and encouragement to help them in faith.....

Be Bold.....

We have to tell people about Jesus...and we have to do it in a way that is consistent with our culture today.....

Biblically, Paul put it like this:

2 Corinthians 5:11-15: Friendship with God through Christ

¹¹ We know what it means to fear the Lord, and so we try to persuade others. God knows us completely, and I hope that in your hearts you know me as well.

¹² We are not trying again to recommend ourselves to you; rather, we are trying to give you a good reason to be proud of us, so that you will be able to answer those who boast about people's appearance and not about their character.

¹³ Are we really insane? It is for God's sake. Or are we sane? Then it is for your sake.

¹⁴ We are ruled by the love of Christ, now that we recognize that one man died for everyone, which means that they all share in his death.

¹⁵ He died for all, so that those who live should no longer live for themselves, but only for him who died and was raised to life for their sake.

Pause for a few moments in silence..... and rededicate yourself to God or ask God to fill your hearts and minds with what God wishes us to do in his service.....

Another question for you: Who are the modern disciples today ?????

But first let's look at a disciple from Jesus' ministry and as today is St Andrew's Day – the Patron Saint of Scotland it seemed appropriate for us to have a look at Andrew.

St. Andrew was one of Jesus' closest disciples, but people know little about him. Here are 5 facts about him:

1) Who was St. Andrew?

He was the brother of Peter. Andrew is regularly mentioned *after* Simon Peter, which suggests that he was Peter's younger brother.

Like his brother Peter, and their partners James and John, Andrew was a fisherman on the Sea of Galilee.

2) What is significant about his name?

It is interesting that Andrew's name is of Greek origin, not Aramaic. The fact that their father—Jonah (or Jonas)—gave his elder son (Simon) an Aramaic name and his younger son (Andrew) a Greek name reflects the mixed Jewish-Gentile environment of Galilee.

3) How close was Andrew to Jesus?

In the synoptic Gospels and Acts, the twelve apostles are always listed in three groups of four individuals. The first of these groups indicates those who were the closest to Jesus. It includes the two pairs of brothers: (1) Peter and Andrew, the sons of Jonah, and (2) James and John, the sons of Zebedee.

Andrew was thus one of the four disciples closest to Jesus, but he seems to have been the least close of the four.

4) It is ironic that Andrew was more distant to Jesus than Peter, James and John?

Because he was one of the *first* followers of Jesus. In fact, he discovered Jesus *before* his brother Peter did.

5) What do the Gospels reveal to us about St. Andrew?

There are three notable incidents. The first occurs when Jesus performed the miracle of feeding the 5000.

On that occasion, it was Andrew who pointed out to Jesus the presence of a young boy who had with him five barley loaves and two fish: not much, he remarked, for the multitudes who had gathered in that place (John 6: 8-9).

A second instance is when he and the other core disciples question Jesus about his statement that the beautiful stones of the temple will be torn down.

In answer to this question Jesus gave an important discourse on the destruction of Jerusalem and on the end of the world.

From this event we can deduce that we too should not be afraid to ask Jesus questions

In a third instance, St. Andrew—with his Greek name—serves as a bridge between Jewish and Gentile followers of Jesus.

The scene is still Jerusalem, shortly before the Passion. For the Feast of the Passover, John recounts that some Greeks had come to the city, who had come to worship the God of Israel at the Passover Feast.

Andrew and Philip, the two Apostles with Greek names, served as interpreters and mediators of this small group of Greeks with Jesus.

And today's disciples?..... I leave you to make up your own mind who today's disciples are as we hear our 5 vows that make up the Christian Faith as it is stated within the Church of Scotland.....in practice there is one Vow, and 4 promises in order to meet that vow.....

The 5 Vows:

First Vow: I believe in one God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit; and I confess Jesus Christ as my saviour and Lord.

Quote from Church Member: "Knowing that I have Jesus as my Saviour is the greatest gift of all"

Second Vow: I promise to join regularly with my fellow Christians on the Lord's Day.

Quote from Church Member "When Christians meet together I am reminded of a fire – but when a piece of coal falls into the hearth, it does not continue to burn, the warmth, heat and light slowly die away. So it is important to me that I worship with others on a regular basis to keep the flame burning."

Third Vow: I promise to be faithful in reading the Bible, and in prayer

Quote from Church Member "The Word of the Lord in the Bible is a vital guide for life that sustains me every day. In prayer, I have a living, close relationship with God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit."

Fourth Vow: I promise to give a fitting proportion of my time, talents, and money for the Church's work in the world.

Quote from Church Member "I believe that any talent, time and wealth I have is a gift given to me from God. A fitting proportion of this must therefore be used, as a service to others in honour of God's glory. I perceive this vow to be a contract between myself and God, the practice of which brings meaning and fulfilment into my life."

Fifth Vow: I promise, depending upon the grace of God, to confess Christ before men, to serve him in my daily work, and to walk His ways all the days of my life.

Quote from Church Member "I have no hope of fulfilling this promise in my own strength. Accepting the freely-given love, forgiveness and guidance of God, Father Son and Holy Spirit, can help me to change. I am a work in progress."

Amen



"I believe that any talent, time and wealth I have is a gift given to me from God. A fitting proportion of this must therefore be used, as a service to others in honour of God's glory. I perceive this vow to be a contract between myself and God, the practice of which brings meaning and fulfilment into my life."

Just stop and think for a moment.

What are the gifts that you have been given by God and to what extent do you use them to build up our Christian family in the community?

Come and say hello at

St Nicholas Church

We would love to see you – services every Sunday at 10.30am

St Nicholas Parish Church, Sighthill
122 Sighthill Loan
Edinburgh
EH11 4NT

Web Address: www.stnicholasedinburgh.org.co.uk