

SERMON

Hebrews 11:29-12:3

Stories of Faith

Nunawading and Waverley, 14-8-22

Stories of faith inspire us. Dear old Ruth Weeks told me how her confirmation lessons with her pastor changed her life and made Christ alive for her. The privilege of being a pastor, is that I hear stories of faith from wonderful Christians. You and I are **surrounded by a cloud of witnesses**, alive and dead. Their example of a faithful life, especially in hardship, gives us strength. Many of the saints of biblical history are mentioned in chapter 11 of the book of Hebrews. Some were childless, others caught up in war, many suffered disease and premature death, danger was all around them and some were even tortured and murdered for their faith. The Spirit has given them to us as people to follow so that we do not give up.

We do grow weary and lose heart, from time to time. Some, even lose faith. Maintaining trust in the boring and tedious moments of our daily lives is a challenge. The routines and lack of change dull our faith. Trust is tested during trials, when things keep going wrong and we have one trouble after another. Those who spend years caring for someone, know how you can be worn down and faith is weakened.

We are the church and the Holy Spirit knew what he was doing when he brought us together by baptising us into the one body of Christ. We need each other. Christ understood this when **he promised to be present when two or three gather in his name**. There is 'safety in numbers' because there is friendship, praying for one another, sharing our problems and receiving encouragement, all of which, keep us going.

But we also have our stories of faith. You have at least one story of the Father's grace in you. Think about your story. Start with what you really want in life. Is it acceptance, peace, love, success, money. What do you really want? Now, think of what blocked obtaining what you wanted. Perhaps you reached the top of the mountain, and wondered, "what next?" Perhaps you had enemies. Maybe you tried to find happiness and love the wrong way. Envy and discontent ruined things. Think of how your dream was interrupted or went off track. Now, how did your Lord Jesus change that for you? Perhaps he helped you resolve inner conflicts or he forgave you or cleansed you from bad memories and experiences. His presence brought you peace or stopped you chasing vain and empty things. Your story has those three parts: what you

wanted, you started on your dream but things went wrong, and Jesus changed everything. That is your story.

There are other stories of faith, too, that have to do with the way the Father cares for us and sometimes intervenes in a miraculous way. The Hollywood film “Thirteen Lives” is mentioned in the Eternity magazine, based on the dramatic cave rescue of thirteen boys trapped in a Thailand cave. Adun is a Christian and he spoke about what it meant for him as the monsoonal waters were rising.

This is what he told the world about that time: ‘By the tenth night, we were losing patience, hope, physical energy, and courage. We could not do anything to help [the situation]. The only thing that I could do was to pray. I prayed “Lord, I’m only a boy. You are Almighty God, you are holy, and you are powerful. Right now, I can’t do anything. May you protect us, come to help us all 13.”’ After seventeen days, the international team of divers managed to free the boys. Adun spoke to the divers when he emerged from the cave alive: ‘Help came from God during the hardest time. I very intently prayed, and God answered me with his help. It was God and me together facing that situation, and I am thankful to him for helping me get out of the cave.’ If a fourteen year-old lad can witness in this way, then surely you and I can. Let us be this cloud of witnesses telling our stories of faith.

Adun, even has a word for those who feel trapped: ‘I would say to be patient and confident in God. Pray and wait on God with hope.’ This young man was acting within this cloud of witnesses, adding his testimony to the long, long list of people who overcame by their trust in the Lord Jesus. Each of us has a story of Christ’s victory over the grave, over our shame, our loneliness and grief and failed dreams. Let us start telling our stories to each other so that **we can run with perseverance.**

The word of God tells us **to fix our eyes on Jesus and throw off any encumbrance that weighs us down** and weakens our faith. We can run with a story of faith. The courage of others and their endurance helps us towards the finishing line. Aborigines speak of “story-lines” and “song-lines”. We value our stories because they are a map that show us the route we are to take, just as the word speaks of **a race set out before us**. Our stories, as varied and personal as they are, speak of the one road of Jesus who is the way. It is the road heading towards deliverance, of the perfecting of what we already say is beautiful, of reaching the presence of our father so that our lives can finally be harmonised with his. Would you be brave enough to share your story with the church? If what I am saying is stirring within you, let me know.