

Streetsville United Church
Sunday, October 24, 2010
Rev. John Tapscott

"WILL HE FIND FAITH?"

Luke 18:8

You may have heard about the father taking his little daughter for a car ride in the country. She had many questions as she took in the sights. "Is that a farmer's house over there, daddy?" she asked. "I don't know, honey," he replied. "How high is that hill, Daddy?" "I really don't know," he said. "What makes the leaves change colour in the fall?" "I don't know, dear, you'll have to ask a scientist." "How deep is that lake, Daddy?" "I don't know." "Daddy, I hope you don't mind me asking all these questions." "Oh no, dear," he replied, "how else would you ever learn anything?"

Well, it's through asking questions that we do learn things. So don't be shy about asking questions and don't lose heart in your asking. For through asking good questions you can learn much. Asking questions about Christian faith can lead to a strengthening of your faith. In the 3 week course that starts in a couple of weeks, "The Case for Faith", Lee Strobel answers some of the most common objections and questions about the Christian faith. I hope some of you will come along. In any case, I hope you'll never be afraid to tell me what's on your mind. I don't know everything and I don't have every answer, but at least I'll try to find out.

Now the questions we ask are a great way to learn. But the questions a good teacher asks us are also a way to learn. They stimulate our thinking and lead us to discover the answer. Jesus, the Master teacher, often asked questions. One such question is this one recorded in Luke's Gospel, chapter 18:8, "And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?" Now of course, Jesus knew the answer to his own question, but the question was designed to stimulate the thinking and the action of the early church. And it does that for the church, today.

Now the question comes at the end of a parable that Jesus told. Luke tells us that it's about the need to pray always and not lose heart. In a certain city there was a crooked judge. A widow came to him saying, "Grant me justice against my opponent." Commentators suggest that it had to do with a dispute over an inheritance or a house. In any case, the judge refused for a while, but the widow kept coming to him again and again. Finally he said to himself, "Though

I have no fear of God and no respect for people, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by her continual coming." Now we might miss this, but in the original language the judge's words suggest that he was beginning to fear physical harm. Picture the widow becoming so frustrated with his refusal that she finally bops him over the head with her umbrella. Well, he didn't want that, so he finally granted her justice. And Jesus said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long in helping them? I tell you, he will quickly grant justice to them."

Now be sure to see that God is not like the unjust judge, rather, God is **unlike** him. Jesus was saying, "If an unjust judge finally gives justice to a persistent widow, how much more will the loving Heavenly Father give justice to his praying and persistent children?" But then Jesus turns the question back to the church. "And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?" And make no mistake. The Son of Man is coming and we will meet him, either at the end of our earthly lives or at the end of the age when he comes again as Judge and Lord. So let's consider this question from several perspectives.

First of all, I think the answer to the question is positive. Yes, the Son of Man will find faith on earth when he comes.

I say this on the basis of the Gospel itself. Do you remember that Jesus told a great parable about the sower setting out to sow seed. There were four kinds of soil, three of which proved unfruitful, but one of which brought forth a great harvest.

You see, we said that God is unlike the judge in the parable. Actually, God is more like the persistent widow. Again and again, God comes to a world that says "No" to him. God is a persistent sower, always spreading the seed of the Gospel. The Holy Spirit is restless and moving, now here, now there, visiting this one, now that one, hoping to find fertile soil. And Jesus' parable of the sower assures us that he will find good soil. There will always be people receptive to the Gospel, turning to Christ and receiving him in faith, serving him, praying, growing, and together bringing forth a harvest of righteousness and good works. Indeed, the Holy Spirit is at work right now, tilling the hard and rocky soil in people's hearts and making them more receptive to the Gospel. So hearts that reject God now may eventually yield themselves to the love of God and the message of Christ crucified. To be sure, not all people will be or become good soil, but at least some will be.

Furthermore, if you turn to the last book of the Bible, Revelation, you see that even during times of tribulation and distress there are people still holding fast to Christ, looking expectantly for His coming, being strengthened by the Holy Spirit and strengthening one another. So taking the Biblical picture as a whole, we must say, "Yes, the Son of Man will find faith on earth when he comes," not in everyone perhaps, but certainly in some.

But now there's a second way to look at the question - when the Son of Man comes we he find faith in you and in me? That's a personal way of looking at the question.

Now our faith in Christ originates with him. He is the author and finisher of our faith. It is his gift to us, which comes to us as we hear the Gospel message. And if there is faith in your heart now, faith in God, trust in Christ, you want it to be there when he comes. I certainly don't want to be left on the outside when Christ comes. How awful that would be. I want to be gathered up in the arms of Christ with all his people. When the Son of Man comes I want him to find faith in me, true faith, saving faith, growing faith. And isn't it true for you, too.

But, and there is a but, faith is a gift that must be nurtured otherwise it can be lost. We need to know this. In the parable of the seed and the four kinds of soil, some of the soil which was promising at the beginning turned out not to be so good after all. The seed started to grow but didn't take proper root in the thin soil. Thorns grew up and choked it. Sadly, many people who start off with excitement about finding and trusting and following Christ, lose their faith over the years. They become discouraged or more commonly they become distracted by the world.

There is a minor character in the New Testament by the name of Demas, whom Paul mentions three times. And it's interesting how Paul refers to him - first, as Demas, my fellow worker, then just Demas, and finally, Demas, having fallen in love with this present world, has deserted me. And the story of Demas is told over and over again. Just look at any church membership list. Many people who started so well in the Christian life have fallen out of the race. The faith they had has been lost. When the Son of Man comes, he will find no faith in them, sadly.

But it doesn't have to happen to you and me. This is why Jesus' question follows a parable about the need to pray always and not lose heart. It is a parable about persevering in faith, even when it seems that God delays. Keep praying, says Jesus, keep trusting, keep serving, keep focus on God's promises in Scripture. God is no unjust judge, but the loving Heavenly Father who answers prayer and has provided a future for his children beyond our imagining.

God's time may not be our time, but it's always the right time, the best time.

The writer to the Hebrews encourages us to run the race with perseverance, looking unto Jesus. Ask the Lord to help you. He will strengthen you to persevere, even in times when you are tempted to drop away. He will keep you from losing heart. Don't be a stranger at God's house. Be fed frequently at the Lord's table. Nurture the gift and the Son of Man will certainly find faith in you when he comes.

"And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?" Here's another way to ask this question, so appropriate for stewardship Sunday. **"When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith in others because of your faithful giving and serving?"**

Faith is personal, but it is to be spread and shared. And quite frankly, the church, for all its flaws, is where many people find faith and grow in faith. Through our Sunday School and youth programs seeds of faith are planted in children and young people. Through our adult education courses and small groups, faith is nurtured and strengthened. Here in worship faith is proclaimed so that the Son of Man may find faith in you and in me when he comes.

It may sometimes seem that the church is like the persistent widow, coming back again and again and asking for money. But I don't apologize. So much of what you and I spend our money and energy on is good and necessary, but it's temporal. It will be gone one day. But the good work which the church does in the community and among its members has eternal significance. The Kingdom gifts that the church stands for and spreads, - faith and hope and love,- these are eternal. After all else is gone, these will remain. You and I have the opportunity to use our resources to support work on earth that has eternal value. Are you using your gifts and resources so that the Son of Man will find faith in others when he comes? Ask yourself, "Am I, to the best of my ability, supporting the preaching of Christ Crucified and Risen, am I supporting and encouraging and doing good works which spread the Christian faith?"

These shoe-boxes we fill not only provide gifts for needy children overseas at Christmas. Every child who receives a box also hears the story of God's greatest gift, Jesus Christ. That's the motivation behind all that we do really, to spread the love and the name of Jesus Christ so that when he comes, he will find faith in many souls. When the Son of Man comes, I certainly want him to find faith in me. And by God's grace and my perseverance, he will. But I also hope to say to him, "And because of the way I used my resources and my gifts, here are some others in whom you will find faith, too." What a privilege we've been given, to use our money and our gifts for this great and eternal purpose.