



FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT- FAITHFULNESS

Text: Psalm 33; Matthew 25:14-28 Galatians 5:22&23

By: Rev Dr Leo Douma

Date: 7th August, 2016

Do you know what this photo is? Yes it's 'Old Faithful' the geyser in Yellowstone National Park. It was named that because it faithfully erupts in a regular way. It was once call 'Eternity's Timepiece'. Sometimes nature is more faithful than we are. I remember looking for a card at a newsagency. Which can be frustrating because so many are either crude and rude or sentimental and sappy. I saw a Hallmark card that said 'I can't promise you forever, but I can promise you today.' That's about as deep a commitment as some are willing to make. It doesn't happen so much any more that couples remain married for 40 –50 years. It requires commitment, sacrifice and loyalty. In other words faithfulness. When I was young our family lived on a farm, which meant an hour drive to the church. We went to church twice every Sunday. And Dad also brought us boys to Catechism each week, and the youth club. Though Dad was a rough diamond, his faith was expressed in his commitment; his faithfulness. The story is told of a man who had prayed 50 years for his friend when he was finally converted. Such is the fruit of faithfulness.

The seventh fruit of the Spirit, 'faithfulness', is not a much used word any more. But it is faithfulness that keeps society together. Every human being lives by faith. From the moment we wake and get ready for work, we are continually trusting and dependent on others. We breath air we cannot see. We eat food we have not examined. We keep appointments with people we trust will be there. We drive through intersections assuming the others won't drive through the red light. We board planes we trust will stay up till they are meant to come down. We live by faith because we were created to live in an environment of dependence; dependence on each other and especially dependence on God. But 'faith' also requires 'faithfulness' or it will produce only disaster. What happens when our water supply is not clean, when vitamin tablets don't contain what they say. What happens when we trust a banker and get a crook, trust a

husband and get domestic violence, trust a boss and get the sack? To live properly we live by faith in each other, which depends on our faithfulness to each other.

The Greek language shows how close 'faith' and 'faithfulness' go together. Only one word in the Greek is used to describe both, the word '*pistis*'. That's why some translations of the Bible list '*faith*' as the seventh fruit of the spirit and others '*faithfulness*.' The word '*pistis*' means 'to be assured, a firm persuasion, a conviction based upon hearing, reliability or dependability'. The closely related word '*patho*' means 'to persuade, to trust, to have obedience, to believe, to be confident in.' The Hebrew word for faith is '*ahman*' which means 'to believe, to have assurance in, to be faithful, to be established, to be verified.' Our faithfulness verifies the faith we have. If I say I have faith in God, but I don't do anything to show my faith, then I do not show myself to be faithful to what I believe. It is interesting that the Hebrew word '*ahman*' has as its original meaning 'the mother or nurse of a child.' Very deep is the love of a mother for her child. The child is totally dependent and trusting on its mother and the mother in her love is always caring and reliable. As Isaiah asks: "*Can a mother forget the child at her breast?*" So faithfulness can be defined as 'the concept of unfailingly remaining loyal to someone or something and putting that loyalty into consistent practice, regardless of extenuating circumstances'. One commentator says 'Faithfulness is the Christ-like quality of dependability- stability in our relationship with God and reliability in our relationship with others.' Another commentator put it 'Faithfulness is love hanging on.'

The greatest example of faithfulness is God himself. Remember that the fruit of the Spirit are in fact the characteristics of God. It's the Spirit's task to develop that character in us as believers. God's faithfulness means that God is trustworthy. He is very dependable. He doesn't change. He is as solid as a rock. All his words in the Bible are trustworthy. God keeps his promises. Behind the universe is a faithful God. Listen to the Psalmists praising the faithfulness of God: (Psalm 36:5) "*Your love, O Lord, reaches to the heavens, your faithfulness to the skies.*" (Ps. 89:2) "*I will declare that your love stands firm forever, that you established your faithfulness in heaven itself.*" (Ps. 100:5) "*The LORD is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations.*" (Ps. 146:5-6) "*Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD his God, the Maker of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them- the LORD, who remains faithful forever.*" The universe is an enormous place, with

billions of stars all orbiting in an orderly way. It is so orderly we have been able to navigate by the stars for thousands of years. There is without fail a day after each night. The seasons come and go, because God is faithful as Genesis 8 points out. Scientists conduct experiments, make notes and search out patterns that can be mathematically described. They depend on the reliability of everything in nature behaving as it has in the past and will in the future. By that they can develop theories and formulae which they call 'laws of nature'. What they are, in fact, describing are the habits of God. They are witnessing and documenting God's timeless and enduring manner of maintaining and caring for the creation he made. These laws are a grand exhibit of the faithfulness of God.

God's faithfulness is also seen in the covenants he made in salvation history and all the promises he kept. He promised Abraham that he would be a "*blessing to all the nations*". After saving Israel from slavery in Egypt he promised to care for them and bless them if they were obedient and to punish them if they were not. And God faithfully did both. God promised David that one of his sons would always remain on the throne, culminating in the Son who would rule forever. All of God's covenants were fulfilled in Jesus Christ. In Jesus Christ the faithfulness of God finds its fullest and deepest expression. Through Jesus' death and resurrection all the promises of redemption were fulfilled including the very first promise in Genesis 3:15 "*He will strike your head and you will bruise His heel.*" God is faithful. He keeps his promises. His word is ever true. We can depend on that. Jesus too, fulfilled all he did through obedience, through his faithfulness. Not once did Jesus sin, even though sorely tempted by the devil. He remained faithful even when in the Garden of Gethsemane the reality of the coming suffering in hell seemed to overwhelm him. But he said, "*Not my will, but yours be done.*" It was Jesus' faithfulness that kept him hanging on the cross when everyone tormented him to come off the cross and prove he was the Son of God. Hebrews 3:1-2 reminds us to "*Fix your thoughts on Jesus, the apostle and high priest we confess. He was faithful to the one who appointed him...*" Revelation describes Jesus (Rev. 19:11) as "*faithful and true*".

All that we have as Christians, our forgiveness and treasures in Christ, have come about because God is faithful and Jesus was faithful. And our hope for what is yet to come is based on the faithfulness of God. Remember that every time you see a rainbow. Every time you pick up a Bible, remember that God said "*Heaven and earth will pass away,*

but my words will never pass away." (Matthew 24:35). Every time you come to worship remember Jesus said *"Where two or three come together in my Name, there am I with them."* (Matthew 18:20). Every time you participate in the Lord's Supper, remember Jesus saying *"I will be with you always to the end of the age."* One passage summarises it all (Lamentations 3:22,23) *"Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness."* The songwriter who responded to that was right when he wrote, *"Great is your faithfulness, O God my father... morning by morning new mercies I see. All I have needed your hand has provided; great is your faithfulness Lord unto me."*

God and Jesus have set the example. They have shown their character. Now the Spirit is to work that faithfulness in us. Because God is faithful to us, we are to be faithful to him. If we have faith in God, then it will express itself in our faithfulness. The church is described in Ephesians as *"the bride of Christ."* So like a faithful spouse we are called to remain true in our love for Jesus. He is to be the number one object of our time and love and attention. Serving him is to be the first goal of our lives. To do less, to turn our heads and give first place to some one or something else could be described as being unfaithful to Jesus. So there is for us the call to personal devotion to Jesus. If we call ourselves Christians, if we say we love Jesus, then how much time do we spend with the one we love? Is prayer and personal Bible reading part of what we do every day? We say we love Jesus. Is that evident in the language that comes out of our mouth, in the business we do, in the friends we make. Is it evident in the way we handle our time and money and talents, in the way we teach our children, in the time we spend with our spouse. A little word study of faithfulness in the New testament sees it connected with 'service' (Ephesians 6:21), 'marriage' (1 Timothy 5:9), 'prayer' (Romans 12:12), 'ministry' (Colossians 1;7), 'truth' (3John 3) 'persecution' (Rev.13:10) 'death' (Rev 2:10). In all of life are we faithful to Jesus? Not only must we be faithful as individual Christians, but as a church. Are we faithful in gathering together each Sunday? Acts 2 reminds us that those who were converted after Pentecost *"met constantly to hear the apostles teach and to share the common life, to break bread and to pray."* Are we faithful as a congregation in searching out God's will for us in the time and place he has put us? Are we faithful as God's people to sound out the call of God against abuse and injustice, to stand up for those who suffer and are trampled upon? Are we ready to expend our effort and time and money to help bring in the kingdom? Are we faithful in our mission to 'grow as disciples and make disciples of others'? In the parable of the

talents (Matthew 25 :14ff) there is a strong emphasis on "*faithfulness*". The word is mentioned four times. We are to be faithful with the things God has given us and made us stewards of. Things like time, spiritual gifts, money, the gospel message of Christ. What are we doing with these things? Are we burying them? Or are we investing them in the kingdom, so that when Jesus returns he will say "*Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things.*"

Faithfulness is something we all need to grow in. For us to grow we need to be led by the Spirit. Remember we are dealing with the Fruit of the Spirit. It is the Spirit who opens our eyes to the Bible as it teaches us about God's faithfulness. The Spirit brings to our minds just how much we need the benefits that come because of God's faithfulness. The Spirit stimulates us to respond in faith, to express trust, to praise God for his wonderful faithfulness. Sometimes the Spirit gives us little, very manageable opportunities to practice faithfulness. As we develop we are faced with larger challenges to increase our spiritual stamina. As the parable of the talents says "*You have been faithful in small ways. I will put you in charge of much more.*" We need to crawl before we walk. We learn to be faithful in tithing with our pocket money, so we learn to remain faithful in giving when the mortgage is high. We are faithful in sharing the gospel with a special friend, then challenged to faithfully witness in a public setting. Sometimes the Holy Spirit places us in situations where we are forced to rely on God, to trust him, to be faithful in accepting his provisions. Or the Spirit gives us quiet moments of teaching, by allowing us to observe the wonder of creation and see God's faithfulness in the seasons and the laws of nature. Sometimes the Spirit develops faithfulness in us through the faithfulness of our church community. He uses the spiritual momentum of others to carry us along where our faithfulness is lacking, to be an inspiration for those who are tired or discouraged. We see it when we celebrate a baptism or profession of faith and as a community we pledge support. When we wonder if there is anything in this Jesus business and our faith takes a tumble, the faithfulness of others impresses us that God is indeed faithful, in Jesus there is indeed forgiveness and life.

The key thing in our relationship with Jesus is that we remain faithful to him and to what he has called us to do. Max Lucado tells the story of Norman Geisler. As a child he went to a Sunday School because he was invited by some children in the neighbourhood. He went back to that Sunday School for over seven years, 400 Sundays.

Each week he was faithfully picked up by a bus driver. Week after week he attended but never made a commitment to Christ. Finally, in his last year of high school, after being picked up for church after 400 times he committed his life to Jesus. What if that bus driver had given up on Norman at 395. What if the bus driver had said 'This kid is going nowhere spiritually, why waste any more time on him? It's a waste of time to pick up this kid'? A person came to Christ because a bus driver, in his own simple way was faithful. Will you do that? Will you be faithful? Will Jesus say of you *"Well done, good and faithful servant"*?

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

These questions can be followed up personally, with a Christian friend, in your small groups, or in discussion after the service. Reflection is important because too often we hear a good sermon and soon forget it without actually growing spiritually or changing in attitude or what we do. The reflection questions are meant to be challenging, because our spiritual growth and the salvation of others is so important.

- What does the Bible mean when it speaks of 'faithfulness'? Define 'faithfulness' as a fruit of the Spirit?
- How has God demonstrated his faithfulness? Think of examples in creation, providence, covenant promises? What is the ultimate proof of his faithfulness?
- Given how faithful God is to us, how are we demonstrating our faithfulness to him? Are we faithful in the little things? Has he given you larger things to show your faithfulness? Will God say of you *"Well done, good and faithful servant"*?