**Sunday 14th June 2015 – Newton Flotman – 11am Family Communion**

**Answers to Doubt: Remember, remember**

**The importance of recalling and praise**

**Deut 8:1-18**

**Luke 15:25-32**

**Psalm 77**

This is week 3 of our series on Answers to Doubt...

Most of us at some time probably experience something of the tension between faith and doubt....

We imagine that doubting means falling from faith and that faith should be crystal clear and forever the same. Doubt is therefore regarded as failure, a movement away from faith, something to be ashamed of.

But doubt can be healthy if it leads us to go deeper, to explore in more detail. God can use it to strengthen our faith and bring us closer to him.

The danger comes when doubt is allowed to undermine our faith. When doubt goes unchallenged – if it lingers too long, it can grow - and lead to problems...

Doubt is different from lack of interest or cynicism – people who dismiss Christianity in a cynical manner, with no interest in it, are not doubting. They are rejecting. They are quite certain they want nothing to do with it.

Doubt already shows a degree of involvement with and belief in what is being doubted...so doubt is a very real part of the faith journey for many people.

Today our topic is ‘Remember, remember’... doubts can arise when we forget what God has done. So we’re looking at the importance of remembering (and – closely related – area of gratitude, which spills over into praise... )

**Definitions of remember**

recall

bring back to the conscious mind, things that exist in memory

recollect

Re-member can be seen as the opposite of dis-member

if something is dismembered it is separated...

to bring together, make whole – solid – to make sense of what was scattered

blurred....clarity of focus!

*Remember remember the fifth of November*

*gunpowder, treason and plot*

*I see no reason why gunpowder treason*

*should ever be forgot*

**Remembrance is important**

We set aside a specific day to remember past wars – not to glorify them - but to recall that freedom was bought at a price – to acknowledge the sacrifice that was made and to learn lessons which we hope will help us avoid further wars.

**There is great power in remembering**

At the last supper, as he broke bread and shared wine, Jesus told us to ‘*Do this in remembrance of me’*...

Actively participating in an act of remembering gives us the opportunity to take it in at a greater depth – it makes more of an impact on us.

**NB elsewhere the Bible encourages us to forget...**

*Forgetting what is behind... and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus....*(Philippians 3:13b-14a)

Forgetting in this sense is about letting go – we don’t let a negative past hinder our future. Jesus has set us free and the past no longer has a hold on us.

But remembering what we’ve been saved from – remembering that ‘there but for the grace of God go I’ – (not to look down on others but to remember the transforming work of God in our own lives) – is crucial for keeping doubt away...

A friend of mine was persuaded to come to church by a neighbour – she came reluctantly – then said she wasn’t coming again – but she did... God had met with her and before long she became a familiar face...

Things had happened in her past which meant she was shy, withdrawn, lacking confidence. Soon she realised that at church, she was among friends.

It was such a blessing to see her grow as a person. Her facial expression changed, she stood taller, she looked younger, she smiled and laughed – yes, there were still tears along the way – and temporary setbacks - as by the grace of God she battled with and overcame her past. She has gone from strength to strength, taking a significant part in the life of the church – getting involved with the worship group and really knowing herself loved and accepted by God and the church family...

Now and again we meet up and have a chat – she is full of thanksgiving because she remembers where she was and how far she’s come – and she knows it’s only been possible because God has done it. She still struggles with certain issues herself and within her family but whenever something comes up to knock her back, she remembers what God has done for her in the past and she knows without doubt he’ll bring her through again....

She’s a strength and inspiration for others... Her testimony is so encouraging. God is glorified in her life....this is the power of remembering – it’s not about holding on to the past in a way that keeps us trapped by it – we are free in Christ – but it’s about simply refusing to forget that without God – we would be...without hope.

**Remembering is linked to thanksgiving – we are to Magnify the Lord –**

(Holy Communion – sometimes called the Eucharist – Greek for thanksgiving – we say the ‘Great Thanksgiving Prayer’)

Psalms...are full of remembering with thanksgiving

Mary’s Song (the magnificat)- her rejoicing at the knowledge that she will be the mother of Jesus...

*My soul magnifies (or glorifies) the Lord* she says...

What’s all this about? We can’t magnify God, in the sense that we can’t make him bigger than he is, or more important than he is...

But we can focus on him more than we do... and this increases our own awareness and appreciation of who he is.

So praise and worship is crucial – not only are we commanded to worship God (Worship God and him only) but doing so is key to having and maintaining a solid foundation of faith

Why? Because worship keeps God at the front of our minds. The words we use in worship remind us of his attributes – and the deeds he has done for us – the blessings he has showered upon us

the death he died in our place

the resurrection and gift of eternal life

the freedom he won for us -

his love for us –

his forgiveness of us –

his faithfulness to us –

his patience with us –

his kindness towards us...

All of this remembering will keep us strong –and the stronger we are, the less we’ll be troubled by doubt!

**In the OT the children of Israel went through a cycle of remembering and forgetting God.**

When things were going wrong they knew their dependence on him,

they cried out to him and got close to him -

they did what he said and behold – things improved!

But when things went well for any length of time, their dependence on God diminished and they began to go their own way and so they were back to square one... with another lesson to learn...

This can be true of us personally...when things are tough, we turn to God in prayer, we lean heavily on him.

Then things get better and we soon begin to think that actually we’re doing ok – pretty well in fact – we start to rely less on God and convince ourselves that we are self-sufficient...independent – not needing to look to God.

God knows this. In the OT he commanded certain festivals to be celebrated annually in remembrance of what he had done for the people.

Passover, for example, retells the story of the Exodus – Moses leading the people from slavery in Egypt... at a Passover meal, the youngest child asks questions about ‘Why do we do this? What does this mean? Why do we celebrate this night...?

It is significant that this memory – this history should be passed on through the generations – lest they forget and move away from God...

The Jewish festivals not only reminded people of what God had done, they also pointed to the One who was to come – the Messiah – Jesus!

And his coming completed the festivals – they were fulfilled in Jesus – so we Christians don’t keep the Jewish festivals (they have much to teach us though!)

Jesus asks us to continue to remember and gives us the communion service as a focus for this... Just as the OT festivals both remembered what God had done and pointed to his coming, so the communion service remembers what Jesus has done and points to his return.

*Do this in remembrance of me...*

our remembering is not just to be passive – but active – DO this in remembrance of me...

Remembering builds our confidence and trust in God. When we hit a problem if we recall how God helped us in the past... our faith is renewed. So remembering undermines our doubts. Remembering God and what he has done gives us a true perspective on life.

**Our reading from Luke’s gospel** – the last half of the parable of the Prodigal Son – shows how the older son’s ungrateful attitude was because he had forgotten his standing within the family:

*‘My son, the father said, you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’* (Luke 15:31-32)

He had forgotten all that was his – and his forgetfulness led to a mean-spirited attitude – his forgetfulness meant that he doubted his own place in his father’s heart...

The minute we forget God and his goodness towards us - we simply lose the plot!

**How to remind ourselves?**

Praise and worship – regular at church! And all places! Carry a song for God in our hearts...

Let it spill over into thanksgiving – show gratitude in how we live! This can be seen in generosity of spirit, in forgiveness, in compassion, in loving others

Bible – be familiar with our family history (Bible!)

Talk about it – remind one another – give testimony – tell others

As we heard in our reading:

*You may say to yourself, “My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.” But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth...* (Deut 8:17 – 18a)

If we continue to doubt, we’ll be set on a downward spiral, more and more convinced of our failure in living the Christian life..... but take heart:

In Matthew’s Gospel we read of the disciples:

*When they saw him* (Jesus) *they worshipped him; but some doubted.* (28:17)

Doubts did not disqualify them from following Jesus – it’s ok to be a Christian and have doubts!

Doubts, are part of the faith journey. They don’t disqualify us. God can use them to deepen our faith as long as we handle them wisely.

We can allow them to undermine our faith and make us feel inadequate, a failure - as if we are on the outside looking in - the only one who just doesn’t get it.

That’s when doubt is destructive. And doubt is a favourite tool of the devil – remember his words to Eve in the Garden of Eden – planting the seeds of uncertainty... loosening her grip on the truth... ‘*Did God really say* …?’

Doubt can keep us in a state of suspension – if we’re tossed to and fro it implies one step forward and one step back – no progression – we are stuck – immobilised and ineffective.... our energy is wasted in the to-ing and fro-ing rather than go-ing and do-ing...

I’ve heard it said that the best way to catch a monkey is to put some tasty food inside a narrow-necked jar... the monkey will put his hand in the jar and grab a fistful of food.

Then he’ll try to pull it out but of course he won’t be able to because his clenched fist is now too big to go through the neck of the jar... he’s trapped because he won’t let go of the food and he lacks the wisdom to realise that the way to freedom is to release his hold on the food...

That’s how we are when we doubt.

Inside the jar is my doubt and as long as I hold on to it, it is a trap and a burden, I cannot know the freedom and release of fullness of faith until I let go of the doubt.

Meanwhile, if we don’t allow doubt to paralyse us we can use it to advantage because it will send us digging deeper.

My prayer is that over the next few weeks we’ll be helped, as together we explore some of the causes of and remedies for doubt.

And we’ll see that with God’s help we can grow stronger as we work through and beyond our doubts.

Just remember - there’s no doubt about it.

**Amen**

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Stephen W Need – 52 Reflections on Faith

Dawn Davidson June 2015