**“Working through doubts and questions”**

Sermon Notes - 7th June 2015

Part of a Series in the Tas Valley Team Ministry

Doubt: Faith in 2 Minds

The book “Doubt” - by Os Guiness is a major resource for this series. The subjects touched upon in this sermon are explored in more depth in chapters 12-15 of this book.

**James 5.19-20**

19 My brothers and sisters, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring that person back, 20 remember this: whoever turns a sinner from the error of their way will save them from death and cover over a multitude of sins.

**John 1.1-3**

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was with God in the beginning. 3 Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

*“To understand doubt is to have a key to a quiet heart and a quiet mind”*

*Os Guiness*

*Recap:* Last week we began to look at Doubt - what it is. The image of the donkey stumbling under a heavy load is a helpful one. What the little donkey needs is not beatings - but maybe a lighter load, some rest and nourishment. In the same way, when we stumble in our faith through doubt we should not beat ourselves up but consider our doubt as a sign that something is wrong - something that needs urgently addressing.

Doubt is “faith in two minds” - a junction in our lives. It is ok to hesitate at a crossroads to work out which way to go - but we need to do that working out, not simply to drift down the easiest looking path!

So this sermon is to do with what we do about doubt - both our own doubts and how we support others who are doubting:-

*James 5. 19My brothers and sisters, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring that person back, 20 remember this: whoever turns a sinner from the error of their way will save them from death and cover over a multitude of sins.*

1. Listening

Because to listen is to love.

Doubt is devastating because it questions a believers faith and threatens to pull out the foundations from their whole life and that of their family. At such a time, we need to know we are understood

If someone comes to you with their doubts, it is such a privilege that they have trusted you. Say little. Listen well. They may not even be able to articulate clearly what is wrong so they need you to attend very carefully.

If it is you who is struggling with doubt - don’t bury it. Listen to what your doubts are saying - seek to understand what the problem is for you - and probably you are meant to share it with a Christian buddy too - we are here to carry each others burdens.

1. Discerning

I am a frequent loser of keys, diaries and other essential small items. My family say that they are going to inscribe on my gravestone. Here lies Sally Gaze “where is everything?”

When I lose something, I don't immediately start an inch by inch investigation o the house - although it is what I may end up doing. But first I think - when and where did I last have them - I retrace my steps. I try to work it out.

The same is true of resolving doubt. When we share a doubt problem with someone we are in effect saying, “Help! I’ve lost my faith. Come over here and help me find it.”

After listening and showing love, we need clear thinking that will calm panic, rule our futile answers and get down to looking in the right places. This is not the same as listening to and caring for the person. This is about beginning to crack the problem which may need a bit of hard cold analysis.

We can do this prayerfully, with confidence because God is our maker - He knows us and wants to mend us.

Here are some questions you may ask yourself if you are trying to help someone or yourself:-

1. What is at the root of the doubt? Is it a doubt that needs answers or is it that the person is suffering from a problem which needs doubts. For example someone who feels bad about doubting may need genuine answers to his doubts as to how the Christian account of creation fits with current scientific understanding. Another person may state this as his doubt, but underlying the doubt may be a need to find an excuse to sideline God beaches doesn't want to do something whih he knows hos faith will require of him - like forgiving someone or stopping an affair.
2. How far has it gone? How deeply is it affecting the persons life?
3. Who needs to take responsibility? e.g.. it may be that the responsibility is with poor teaching resulting in a faulty picture of God - or it may be that the person has made bad choices which are taking him further away from God.
4. Speaking

We need to e slow to speak. Listening and discerning may take hours or weeks. As the letter of James says “Be quick to listen, slow to speak” But when we do have something to say, it should be

* Compassionate
* Frank

“Speak the truth in love”

Be ware of oversimplifying. If you are helping someone else through an issue, there may be something you haven’t understood. There may be a painful wound in that person’s life you can't comprehend what it is like to bear. So speak humbly… most often the person will need encouragement … and only very seldom warning.