

**Trinity 18, Proper 22, Eucharist, Elton
7 October 2007**

**Habakkuk 1:1-4, 2:1-4
2 Timothy 1:1-14
Luke 17:5-10**

There is great comfort and encouragement in these readings. Paul writes to Timothy like a parent to a beloved son or daughter making their way in the world, or a mentor writing to a student in reassurance.

The Gospel message is about faith, and that faith isn't easy, but we don't need a lot. Faith is compared to a mustard seed – tiny, 1 mm across, yet the mustard plant grows to be big enough to shelter birds. In our part of the world we might say instead *mighty oaks from little acorns grow*. So it's not the amount of faith that matters, but the quality.

Paul calls us to 'sincere' faith, an inside faith. Not an external faith, not piety for show. This kind of faith requires us to go deep inside ourselves so that we see ourselves as others see us. Our Lord condemns very few things outright, but he always condemns hypocrisy and pretence, those who pretend to what they're not.

Pretending to what we are not is something we're tempted to do. It's what the Garden of Eden story is about: we cover ourselves up (fig leaf), we hide our true selves behind attitudes, rules, behaviours, tribal rituals.

We find ourselves only by getting rid of these barriers to perception. We come into God's presence not by mindlessly following rules, but by letting God look full on our nakedness: Just as I am. This is the essence of humility: knowing where you are with God, earthed (humus).

When we do this, we start to take responsibility for ourselves instead of blaming others. When we see the beams in our own eyes, we become more humane, more loving, more forgiving of the motes in our neighbours' eyes. We become more delightful, more delighting, more creative, less rigid.

This is liberation. It is salvation. It is the way to holiness and wholeness, for once the fig-leaves of pretence covering our own true selves have been exposed to the light of Christ, the more quickly they fall away to reveal the simple beauty within.

'Tis the gift to be simple, 'tis the gift to be free, 'tis the gift to come down where you ought to be, and when we find ourselves in the place just right, 'twill be in the valley of love and delight. When true simplicity is gain'd, to bow and to bend we shan't be asham'd, to turn, turn will be our delight, till by turning, turning we come round right.

- Take courage from Mother Teresa's doubts.
- Take courage from your own doubts and even from mine.

There is always struggle with God in our relationship with god. Psalmist is often struggling. Struggling brings new life: think how the chick has to struggle through the shell, or the shoot through the earth.

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travel light and without hindrance, so if you want to be a spiritual pilgrim you are to make yourself naked of all that you have – both good works and bad – and throw them all behind you; and thus become so poor in your own feeling that there can be no deed of your own that you want to lean upon for rest

If you do so, ... you shall see in your heart, wholly and fully, your will to have nothing but the love of Jesus and the spiritual sight of him, as far as he wishes to show himself.