

We all have had a very strange past year haven't we? It's been a year for our church family where we haven't met as normal, where we have been concerned about people becoming isolated and lonely, some families suffering from the coronavirus, and many within our community finding it really hard to make ends meet.

There has been so much change to what normally we do. But young people, there is one thing that I am so sure has not changed in all of this, and that is God's goodness, his love, and most of all his faithfulness towards us. That is what we are celebrating today. We may all feel that we have missed out on so much – missing seeing our families, seeing friends, being able to go away on holiday, or being able to play with each other. But God's faithfulness has remained solid throughout.

So what is faithfulness? It's very hard to describe isn't it? So instead of me giving you a description, how about I tell you about someone who I know is very faithful to me.

Someone who is faithful is like a friend who is there for you all the time, a loyal companion who is by your side. I'm going to make a phone call and get my son Josh in here because there's nothing more loyal than someone who is with us all the time.

You see you all thought I was talking about Josh being my loyal companion. And yes he is very loyal, but I have to say that my Spud, my great dog is incredibly loyal. Here's ways in which he is so faithful :

- As I waken up in the morning he is there wagging his tail and greeting me. He never is in a grumpy mood with me;
- When I am working in the office, he is right there next to me all the time. When I move to another room he follows me;
- Spud loves to lick everyone because he wants to be a friend. He never gets angry.

Spud is there all the time for me.

Someone who is faithful will be there all the time. He's there not just in the good days but also in the bad days.

Faithfulness is a 2 way thing. There's no point being faithful to someone and then they are not in any way thankful for it. For each one of us that has a pet, we need to be faithful to them. We need to ensure that they are well taken care of, and that they are not neglected. Spud is faithful to me, and I want to remain faithful to him.

Throughout the bible God has always been faithful to his people. Sometimes however people have not appreciated God's faithfulness. When the tribes of Israel felt deserted, and even when they had given up on God and began complaining to Moses, God was faithful and provided manna from heaven to feed them. Over centuries when other nations would attack them, God would protect them and fight for them. Listen to some of the things written about his faithfulness in the Old Testament – Deuteronomy 7:9 *'Know therefore that the Lord your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations'*

Throughout the Psalms David writes about God's goodness and his faithfulness – Psalm 91:4 *'He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart'*.

Even as we look around us every day we see the many things that God has given to us, many things we maybe take for granted, and yet even though we don't notice them, it displays Gods ongoing faithfulness and goodness towards us. Jesus explained in Matthew chapter 6:25-34 that in the way that God is faithful to look after the flowers in our gardens, as he looks after the birds in the air, he takes care of us and loves us even more than this.

A bit like the Israelites under Moses' direction, so often in our lives we can so easily give up on things – we can think that God is not there for us. In this past year some people may have just given up on God thinking that he really doesn't care for people if he left us with this virus, but God in his faithfulness has never given up on us. If you know of people today who have given up on coming back to church, then give them a call and get them back. They may have stopped coming out, but God hasn't abandoned them.

Here's what the apostle Paul said to his friend Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:13 "Even if we are not faithful, God remains faithful". [Possible Memory verse]

Paul was explaining that all the promises that God has said will come true. That is how faithful he is to all of us whom he loves. He doesn't say something that won't happen. If he promises it, it will be fulfilled. God cannot lie. That's God's faithfulness.

Now we are going to listen to a wonderful and well know story from the Bible that reminds us of God's faithfulness and goodness to his people who trust in him.

Our reading today is an incredible story about how faithful God is to his people. Darius the new King of Babylon needed governors to rule over his kingdom, and then he placed Daniel as their boss because he was such a hard worker. The governors were very jealous of Daniel and so they conspired to get rid of him. It didn't matter how hard they tried, they couldn't find anything wrong with Daniel because he was so honest in what he did. But then knowing how faithful Daniel was to his God, they had the King create a new law so that anyone who didn't worship Darius would be thrown into the lions' den to die. And although Daniel knew the consequences of the new law he still prayed and worshipped God every day. The governors had finally caught him, but when they told King Darius he was really sad, because he knew that it would mean Daniel losing his life for breaking his laws. The next day the King addressed Daniel saying, "May the God who you serve so faithfully save you", and so Daniel was thrown into the den. The king could not sleep all night, because of his worry for Daniel. So the next day he ran to see if God had saved Daniel. There was silence, and then he heard Daniel's voice. He said "God came and shut the mouths of the lions so they could not hurt me". There wasn't a scratch on him. King Darius issued a new command that all the people should honour and respect the God whom Daniel worshipped so faithful. Because Daniel was faithful, God was able to do amazing things in the land.

In this past year we all have had to deal with stuff that has been really tough. Sometimes in life the worries we are dealing with may look like there's no way out of it. For us in church, we were worried when we would get back worshipping together again, and now I'm worried whether some people will ever come back to worship again. We may not have an answer for all the problems we are facing, but remember that God is always faithful. We have got to trust in him, in the way that Daniel did. There's a passage in the bible in I John 5:14 that says, "*if we ask anything according to his will he hears us*".

Remember that God will never leave us on our own or reject us. He has, he is, and he always will be faithful to those of us who put their trust in him. And because of that, remember to say thank you to him. Today is a day of celebration, and so what today can you say thank you to God for? You can thank God that he is always there for you night and day when you need to talk to him, you can thank him for this church family who love us, you can thank him for the many things you have every day – you have food, you have clothes, you have family; and you can thank him for the vaccine which more and more every day starts to restore freedom again back into our lives.

Today is an incredible day within the life of our church family, because we can see how God has looked after us. But we have got to always trust in God. Our faith in him cannot just be when we have exhausted all other possibilities, and it feels like God is our last resort. God is always faithful to us, and therefore we must put our trust and hope in him with everything. For Adults here today, where do you truly put your trust in. Have you put all your security in God because he is faithful, or is your trust in other things? Daniel knew that God was trustworthy and he trusted in God to deliver him. You and I can do the same thing – when things look tough, when we are worried, when we feel trapped, when there seems no answer, trust in God's perfect faithfulness.

Let me pray

Heavenly Father, thank you for your perfect faithfulness to us.

You promised to be a loyal friend to us, to protect us and provide for us, and to help us in our times of need. And for this we give you thanks and praise, in Jesus name. Amen.