

FAITHFULNESS – GOD’S AND OURS

Old Faithful is not the largest geyser in Yellowstone National Park, but it is the most famous. Old Faithful erupts every 35 to 120 minutes for 1½ to 5 minutes at a time. Its maximum height ranges from 90 to 184 feet. The timing of the next eruption depends on the previous one – the longer the eruption lasts, the longer the interval until the next one. It has been erupting in nearly the same fashion throughout the recorded history of the park. Each day there are usually between 21 and 23 eruptions. All this combines to give it its name – Old Faithful; you can turn up at any time of day and you will see it erupt; it is dependable.

The Psalmist rejoices in the works of the Lord, in His wonders! But the big theme is the steady reliability of God. His “steady faithfulness” is seen in providing food every day; the “reassuring stability” of words like faithful, trustworthy, steadfast; three times he uses the phrase “for ever” and once “for ever and ever”. This theme dominates the psalm; the works of God are made to last and His people are in His constant care. God is reliable, dependable, trustworthy, steadfast; He doesn’t change, He doesn’t give up and go away, He doesn’t let us down.

At New Year time, we look backwards and forwards. Here’s a way of looking that can make our faith stronger and give us a deeper awareness of the faithfulness of God. Look back and ask yourself: “what has God given me in the last 12 months? What good thing has God done for me or in me?” Find it and rejoice! Find it and give thanks to God for His faithfulness. Praise God for His steady reliability in providing for you, helping you, strengthening you, bringing you grace and peace.

Look forward: what do you hope and pray that God will do in 2012? Have that hope and ask that prayer in the confidence of God’s ongoing steady reliability!

Jesus told a story: a father has 2 sons. He told the first son “*Go and work today in vineyard*” The son at first refused to go; “*no, I won’t*”, but later changed his mind and went. The second son was told the same thing, agreed to go, said “yes” to his father, but didn’t actually do it! “*Which of the two did what his father wanted?*” The son who went! We are called to be faithful; all that Jesus wants from us is that we are faithful. Our faithfulness to Jesus is not to be found in grand professions that achieve nothing, but in thinking Jesus’ way, being the kind of people Jesus wants and doing the things Jesus wants us to do.

Faithfulness – God has it; He wants to see it in us!

TIMING

“*When the time had fully come...*” (Gal 4:4) at the heart of this little piece about Jesus’ coming is the sense of God’s perfect timing. Rome had conquered and subdued the known world, Roman roads had been built to make travel easier and the Roman legions were enforcing peace and security around world. The old Roman and Greek gods were losing their hold on the common people and hearts and minds of people across the world were hungry for a religion that was real and satisfying. Moses’ law had done its work in preparing people who were longing for freedom from their burdens and guilt! Into this world, God sent His son; Jesus came to be the Saviour of the world and to set

people free; we are redeemed and adopted as children, we are blessed and the gospel has spread.

This set me thinking about the gospel in our times and our hopes and prayers for 2012. The battle will go on for the heart and soul of the nation; we will debate and decide some difficult issues and the media will tell us that religion and the Church are increasingly irrelevant; the Church may well lose more ground in this debate; the church itself will continue to wrestle with issues of finance and the future and what kind of Church we want to be. Yet people will continue to search for the truth and for faith and for a real and satisfying faith. The Stewardship campaign and other initiatives will present a challenge to the Church as well as a way of finding new opportunities for Christian service in our communities. God is still at work in His Church; He has not gone away and we hope and pray that He will bless us. There are things for the Church in 2012 Scotland that God will give us and do for us and in us. The challenge for the Church is to be sensitive to the times in which we live, and adapt the way we think, and the way in which we present the gospel.

The Preacher writing in Ecclesiastes 3 has a picture of time that is unique in the Bible; he shows us all human affairs and how they work together in the ebb and flow of life. All these activities have a place in life and way we live it: *"A time to be born, a time to die, a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance..."* For some of us 2012 will be full of good things and for some it might be full of hard things. For most of us it will be a mixture of both: there will be things to enjoy and things to endure; things to celebrate and things to grieve; things that we love and things that we don't. The beauty of that picture is that God involved in all of it. God is there with us in everything.

God hasn't changed; Jesus hasn't gone away; the Spirit is still at work in us; we are still the children of God; the gospel is still the power of God to save; a new year doesn't change any of that. We are challenged to love God, trust Him, and serve Him in the days that are to come.