

## Sermons at the Anglican Church of Luxembourg

**Sermon title: So heavenly minded...**

**Text: Hebrews 11:1, 12:1-2**

There is a saying in English: someone's so heavenly minded that they are no earthly good

It describes someone who is so idealistic that they lack realism or credibility or even the ability to function in daily life

But it is a shame if it also is used as a subtly acquired attitude among Christians that, even unconsciously, compartmentalises faith from daily life, turning faith into a private part-time Sunday leisure option while the other 6 days of the week we do real things in the real world

To do that robs Christian faith of its truth and robs Christians themselves of the power to live as followers of Jesus in the rough and tumble of daily life

And the writer to the Hebrews and his readers certainly knew about the rough and tumble of daily life

Life in early 60s of C1 Roman Empire was not comfortable for Christians as the emperor Nero began systematic persecutions – the letter to the Hebrews was probably written not long after that and in Ch 10 the writer mentions the withering effect this has had on some followers of Jesus – giving up meeting together, a faltering of confidence: READ 10:32-33, 35

Hebrews 11.1 is one of the most famous verses of the Bible: READ

But do read it in context, not least the verse that comes before it: READ 10:39

Hebrews doesn't have the last word on the nature of Christian faith: what the writer has to say is deeply rooted in this specific context: the danger

of believers stepping back from living their faith in the public sphere, compartmentalising it, privatising it

No, according to Hebrews: living faith is in the rough and tumble of daily life and is:

- firstly purposeful and forward looking
- and is secondly personal and sees the here and now differently

The sort of faith described in Hebrews is no wishy-washy philosophy for life but is purposeful

The images are tough and robust

“Faith is being sure of what we hope for..” (11:1a)

In the next chapter we read that faith is like running a race “marked out for us”: that’s not an aimless running hither and thither

The great human questions are: what is life about and how can I know?

The claim of Hebrews is that, in a complex and dangerous world, Christian faith offers a sense of purpose and direction as we move through life in the here and now

And that purpose now is rooted in looking forwards – again, look at the images.

Being sure of what we hope for is all about looking forwards  
The race we run is about running forwards, getting rid of all that might hold us back (12:1b), whatever hinders or entangles

We are to fix our eyes ahead and not backwards

On its own maybe that sort of faith could result in people who are so heavenly minded that they are no earthly good

Which is why it is balanced in Hebrews by an understanding of faith that is personal and that enables us to see things differently here and now

Look at 12:2 - we are to fix our eyes not on a destination, not an ideal, not on rules, and not even on "God", a term that can be very slippery

READ 12:2

I find it fascinating that the writer doesn't use God, or even Christ, or the Lord but Jesus: the most personal and human of titles for God the Son

And he does so to emphasise Jesus' humanity and the reality of the incarnation – God in our sinful skin, but without sin

Leaving the joy of heaven he endured the cross and much besides: READ v2-3a

And in doing so achieves the opportunity for us to live in relationship with Him: to live a life of faith

Through the cross he gives us faith - that why he is called the author of our faith

And through his grace he works in us to bring that life of faith to fullness – that is why he is called the "perfecter" of our faith

And all of this is won not up in heaven but in the rough and tumble of daily life on earth

What Jesus has done and won was in the here and now and is for the here and now

Which is why the second dimension of faith is not only personal but also enables us to see our here and now differently

READ 11:1b – faith is being certain of what we do not see

The scientific worldview is a good and valid one: reality through our 5 senses

But it is not a complete one – to believe that is another version of saying someone is so heavenly minded etc

To believe and be certain of “what we do not see” is to assert that reality has a spiritual dimension too: and that parallel with the material reality is an eternal one

And faith is simply to believe and live that in such a way that the two go hand in hand - and we call this the Kingdom of God

Which is why at the heart of the prayer that Jesus gave those who want to be His followers in the rough and tumble of daily life are these words: your kingdom come, your will be done

READ 11:1, 12:2-3