



## THE ASSURANCE OF THINGS HOPED FOR

### A Pastoral Letter to the Teulu Asaph from the Bishop

#### Trinity Season 2022

“I believe in God, the Father almighty” we say when we recite the creed at our worship, and the first of our diocesan focus phrases is “Growing Faith”. Faith is probably the foundation from which all Christian discipleship flows. I wonder how we’d assess our own faith – is it strong, or is it weak? Are we certain, assured, of our hope of eternal life, or do we have huge doubts about it all?

The first thing we have to say is that Faith is not the same as belief. There’s a comment on this in the Letter of James in the New Testament: “You believe that God is one. Good for you! Even the demons believe that – and shudder!” (James 2.19) Rather Faith emerges when belief and trust flow together. I can believe that there is a 0958hr train to London from Rhyl – I trust that there is one when I stand on the platform waiting to catch it - and it doesn’t always turn up! So to have faith is to believe and trust, to take the articles of belief and to apply them in life. As the author of the Letter to the Hebrews wrote: “Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” (Hebrews 11.1)

The second thing to say is that to have faith is not to banish all doubt. The opposite of faith is not doubt, it is despair. The creed is long and full of ancient phrases, and some of them may mean little or nothing to you. One or two, you may actively disagree with, and that’s alright, as long as you can be honest to God. When we recite the creed, we line ourselves up with generations of belief and declare the community’s faith. However, to be honest, we may spend a lifetime working out what are actually our convictions. It is rather the willingness to travel with the community’s faith, a readiness to say “This is the working hypothesis on which I am willing to base my life”, that matters. We may have doubts, but while we do not give up and despair that we can ever make progress, while act in the hope that it is probably true, it is enough for God.

There is a story in the Gospels (Mark 9), where a father begs for the healing of his son. “If you can do anything,” he says, “have compassion on us and help us.” Jesus immediately picks up on his phraseology. “If you can!” he replies, “All things are possible for one who believes.” The response of the father is interesting and honest: “I do believe, help my unbelief!” He is given his miracle. My theology teacher taught me to have a “theological top shelf”, a place where I could put the big puzzles of my faith, and leave them until, one day, a talk, a book, an experience, might throw light on it, and unlock it. Trust is to put our hand in the hand of God, and say “I’m prepared to try”, to pray before Jesus: “O come to my heart, Lord Jesus, there is room in my heart for thee.”

Now we can say what Faith is, we can commit our selves to grow it. Our faith grows when we feed it. Small daily acts of faith will increase it, as will times of prayer, and the company of fellow Christians on the way. God comes to us through all these channels, and the more time we spend with God, our faith, and our understanding, will grow.

We should also be willing to sow the seeds of faith in others, inviting them to understand why our Faith is precious and what God does for us. At the heart of Christianity is a God who so loves us that he accepts us, and takes on his own shoulders the cost of our estrangement and disobedience. And we are all welcomed for healing, for hope, and for salvation.

So, I invite you, the diocese invites you, to throw open your hearts to the things you believe and trust can transform our world, and in the victory of Jesus, that makes it all possible. Thanks be to God. Amen.

