

We are certainly living through interesting times. Much anxiety remains on both sides of the divide concerning how Brexit will play out this Halloween. What will happen come the following day is still anyone's guess, most especially for our political leaders. In response, our Primus, Bishop Mark, has requested that churches across the province open their doors this weekend so that anyone nearby can find a holy space to pray for reconciliation in our communities and across the UK. 'Lord, increase our faith!' seems to be an increasingly common cry by Christians from across the denominations. Perhaps you can relate to those who feel theirs waning under the stress and strain of relentless political deadlock and the level of hype whipped up on a daily basis by a frenzied media circus. I know I'm not immune to bouts of dread and worry about what could happen in the future. 'Lord, increase my faith!'. And, amidst all the current confusion and turpitude, what on earth do I use my faith to pray for?

The prophet Habakkuk also lived in interesting times; the inhabitants of Jerusalem were breathtakingly lawless and the city was under dire threat of invasion from the Babylonians. Habakkuk's faith in God's loving care began at a low ebb and, in the first few verses of his book, we hear indignant echoes of Psalm 44 – 'Rise up God! Why are you sleeping?' But by the start of the second chapter, his tone has completely changed – I *will* watch and wait ... for God's revelation to come about when justice and peace will reign. Habakkuk found out that his faith never went away – his deep anxieties had simply hidden it for a while.

The disciples' cry, 'Increase our faith!' is their alarmed response to what Jesus had just told them – don't sin and certainly don't tempt new converts ('little ones') to do so; rebuke others when they sin but *always* be ready to forgive them if they repent, no matter how many times a day they mess up. Jesus' followers would need superpowers to do all that, surely! And how do we make sense of what Jesus said next – 'if you had faith' and being 'worthless slaves'?

The other day I met with +Ian and some other clever folk from the diocese and we began our meeting by reading this Gospel. We were finding it hard to see how these sayings of Jesus fit together, that was until we noticed what the little word, 'If' was doing.

It is easy to jump to the conclusion that Jesus assumed a critical view – that the disciples had no faith and had to get some, quick. But Greek scholars tell me that how St Luke used 'if' meant quite the opposite – what Jesus was actually saying was, 'You have faith. It might be tiny and hard to see at times but you can already do what seems to be as absurd and impossible, like telling this tree to upsticks and throw itself into the ocean. You don't need me to give you more faith – you just need to discover what you've already got.' The sudden twist at the end of Jesus' proverb about masters and slaves gives the disciples (and us) a clue about how to find that faith – by stripping away earthly trappings of privilege and power to become humble channels for God's grace to do extraordinary things. As Habakkuk found out, such a profound discovery isn't instantaneous. We have to wait for it to emerge from behind worldly things that obscure it from view.

During this weekend set aside for prayer for reconciliation in our communities and across the UK, we can usefully reflect on this little word, 'if'. It is oh so tempting to criticize those who shout at one another across the chasm of opinion, believe me but this only helps to inflame this political stramash. Instead pray that our political leaders might lay aside the earthly trappings of privilege and power, to discover that the seemingly impossible question of 'to Brexit or not to Brexit' has an astonishingly simple answer. Live as a slave to faith and we'll all find it together.