

NECMA June 13th 2004

The Faith of our Fathers

***Faith of Our Fathers, holy faith! We will be true to Thee... till death
Not the words of scripture, but from a song, based on the book of Jude***

Jude, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, To those who are called, sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ: Mercy, peace, and love be multiplied to you.

3 Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ.

5 But I want to remind you, though you once knew this, that the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe.

6 And the angels who did not keep their proper domain, but left their own abode, He has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day; as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities around them in a similar manner to these, having given themselves over to sexual immorality and gone after strange flesh, are set forth as an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.

8 Likewise also these dreamers defile the flesh, reject authority, and speak evil of dignitaries. Yet Michael the archangel, in contending with the devil, when he disputed about the body of Moses, dared not bring against him a reviling accusation, but said, "The Lord rebuke you!" But these speak evil of whatever they do not know; and whatever they know naturally, like brute beasts, in these things they corrupt themselves.

11 Woe to them! For they have gone in the way of Cain, have run greedily in the error of Balaam for profit, and perished in the rebellion of Korah. These are spots in your love feasts, while

they feast with you without fear, serving only themselves. They are clouds without water, carried about by the winds; late autumn trees without fruit, twice dead, pulled up by the roots; raging waves of the sea, foaming up their own shame; wandering stars for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever.

14 Now Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men also, saying, "Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints, "to execute judgment on all, to convict all who are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have committed in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him".

16 These are grumblers, complainers, walking according to their own lusts; and they mouth great swelling words, flattering people to gain advantage.

17 But you, beloved, remember the words which were spoken before by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ: how they told you that there would be mockers in the last time who would walk according to their own ungodly lusts. These are sensual persons, who cause divisions, not having the Spirit.

20 But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.

24-25 Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, And to present you faultless Before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, To God our Savior, Who alone is wise, Be glory and majesty, Dominion and power, Both now and forever. Amen.

From notes about it in my NKJV study bible...

A surprisingly large number of the epistles confront the problem of false teachers, almost all allude to it, but Jude goes beyond all other New Testament authors in his relentless and passionate denunciation of apostate teachers who have "crept in unnoticed", an alarming problem which has been with us since day one.

I'd like to read to you some ideas on key individuals' faith from the

epistle to the Hebrews, a book about which the authorship has often caused speculation. Originally thought to be the apostle Paul because of some aspects of it sounding like his writings, and then Peter, but the style is totally wrong for him. The author is not identified within scripture, or externally. A fascinating suggestion is it may have been Paul's mentor, Gamaliel who wrote it, there being a suggestion that he was converted late in life. Who knows!

Hebrews 11:1-3 Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders obtained a good testimony. By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible.

4 By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks.

5 By faith Enoch was taken away so that he did not see death, "and was not found, because God had taken him"; for before he was taken he had this testimony, that he pleased God.

6 But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

7 By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.

8-10 By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

11-12 By faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past the age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised. Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born as many as the stars

of the sky in multitude; innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore.

13-16 These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.

17-19 By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, "In Isaac your seed shall be called", concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense.

20 By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come.

21 By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshiped, leaning on the top of his staff.

22 By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the departure of the children of Israel, and gave instructions concerning his bones.

23 By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden three months by his parents, because they saw he was a beautiful child; and they were not afraid of the king's command.

24-26 By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward.

27 By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible.

28 By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, lest he who destroyed the firstborn should touch them.

29 By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry land, whereas the Egyptians, attempting to do so, were drowned.

30 By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they were

encircled for seven days.

31 By faith the harlot Rahab did not perish with those who did not believe, when she had received the spies with peace.

32-34 And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets: who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens.

35 Women received their dead raised to life again. And others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection.

36 Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment.

37-38 They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented; of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth.

39-40 And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us.

Often we get confused when we look backwards at the history of Christianity and it is all too easy to lump it all together as “tradition” and bury it as being something we don't need... but you know tradition can be good as well as bad.

Mind you, we can equally run headlong into similar problems by insisting on embracing the latest modern fad in rhythm, musical metre, and modern terminology, and changing scripture and the understanding of what it says to us, to be more palatable to we who we are told are so much wiser and more knowledgeable at this end of time.

I've even heard it said that the early biblical people were little more than savages, so therefore they needed a different set of rules... something unbelievable when said by the very people who have

heavily condemned pink skin pigment settlers in our country for saying exactly the same about our Aboriginal brothers.

I learned in a Scout Leader training course decades ago that tradition is a good servant but a bad master. Think about that. To say that all tradition is bad just because we in our elitism decide that we have “moved on past that <insert specific activity or belief here>” is really being rather arrogant on our part.

We ought recognise that all through history that there have been those whose faith has shone like a beacon on a hill, like a lighthouse over the sea. And maybe the era known as the Reformation is a good place to open the books today and have a quick squint.

In school I remember being taught that the Reformation was a “good thing” because the school system was geared to a nation who had taken the side of the reformers at that time. These days we often hear remarks about “what a shame it was that “we” split the church at that time, and that “we” need to get back together again. The proponents of this woolly thinking seem to overlook the reasons behind the split.

It is true that in England there was a political motivation by the reigning king to do so, but by and large there were worthier motives by others. Yes, Henry wanted a divorce. But that was not why the Church of England separated. There were scriptural reasons for that. And certainly on the continent of Europe those reasons were manifested in many truths being realised through the Holy Spirit's influence on teachers of biblical truth who had been forbidden under pain of death for centuries to do so. To teach biblical truth, that is. And you know, the Holy Spirit did NOT want the reformation to end there with man-built denominations. Many people are unaware that Martin Luther did NOT start the Lutheran church. It was his successors who did, during his lifetime, and that greatly saddened the visible initiator of the Reformation.

In England, the structure of the church didn't change much, but its liturgy, its ongoing order of service, and fixed form prayers and scripture readings did, being translated into the “vulgar tongue” of English so it wasn't only the intellectuals who could understand it.

Let me share the words penned by the then Archbishop of Canterbury – Thomas Cranmer – when around 1549 he translated a

statement of faith called the “Te Deum Laudamus” into 16th century English. The words stand well today amongst those who truly believe in scripture, I believe defining OUR faith far better than the minutes of the Councils of Nicea and other places in the 3rd and 4th centuries.

We used to sing this hymn every Sunday morning, at what was called “Matins” in those days. I remember it as my first exposure to what these days are called “Gregorian Chants”.

In those days the churches that used them called them “Canticles” - a word from the Latin meaning “something to be sung”.

This hymn is divided into three separate sections, and alternate lines in each section repeated in the form of a chant, the three sections being sung to different tunes...

*We praise thee, O God, we acknowledge thee to be the Lord.
All the earth doth worship thee, the Father everlasting.*

*To thee all Angels cry aloud: the Heavens, and all the Powers
therein.*

*To thee Cherubim and Seraphim continually do cry,
Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of Sabaoth;
Heaven and earth are full of the Majesty of thy Glory.*

The glorious company of the Apostles praise thee.

The goodly fellowship of the Prophets praise thee.

The noble army of Martyrs praise thee.

*The holy Church throughout all the world doth acknowledge
thee; the Father, of an infinite Majesty;*

Thine honourable, true, and only Son;

Also the Holy Ghost, the Comforter.

Thou art the King of Glory, O Christ!

Thou art the everlasting Son of the Father.

*When thou tookest upon thee to deliver man, thou didst not
abhor the Virgin's womb.*

*When thou hadst overcome the sharpness of death, thou didst
open the Kingdom of Heaven to all believers.*

Thou sittest at the right hand of God in the Glory of the Father.

We believe that thou shalt come to be our Judge.

*We therefore pray thee, help thy servants whom thou hast
redeemed with thy precious blood.*

Make them to be numbered with thy Saints in glory everlasting.

*O Lord, save thy people and bless thine heritage.
Govern them, and lift them up for ever.
Day by day we magnify thee;
And we worship thy Name, ever world without end.
Vouchsafe, O Lord, to keep us this day without sin.
O Lord, have mercy upon us: have mercy upon us.
O Lord, let thy mercy lighten upon us: as our trust is in thee.
O Lord, in thee have I trusted: let me never be confounded.*

The original Latin is accredited to Nicetas (c.335 - c.414) Bishop of Remesiana in what is now Romania. Translated, and included in the Anglican Service by Cranmer in 1549

One of the things that I've come to realise over recent years is that what I accepted at the time – the liturgy, or the repetitious order of service with set prayers, and with led responses, all according to a man-made book of instructions – actually when we examine it with an open heart, is not the boring stuff frequently experienced.

I wonder how many are aware that it was the liturgy of the Russian Orthodox Church memorised by their priests and many of the laity, which kept Christianity alive in the Soviet Union from the revolution of 1917 until the 80s and 90s when their empire started to fall apart.

The liturgy was crucial because the state forbade the usage of any books – bibles, prayer books and hymnals - and I believe it did far more for the presence of God's word in Russia than a thousand Brother Andrews could do, smuggling in bibles.

Last time I preached, I switched topics mid week, under an impulse I believe came from on high.

This time I lost my notes through the failure of the partition table on the hard drive of the computer I use for writing. I keep backups but my latest was April, so I had no notes for today... but perhaps God wanted me to lean on Him more than notes I had already put together. Last time I told Audrey that driving to church the week before when she was leading, I had suddenly felt we should do things differently. Her leading was so refreshing... she included yester-year stuff as well, which was what I was focussing on driving to church. In fact I was singing the Te Deum Laudamus in the car. God works in mysterious ways.

Next Sunday, as we focus on the Communion Table, I shall, if God still wishes me to do so, share another of Thomas Cranmer's beautiful translations into English, called the "Prayer of Humble Access", which really puts in a nutshell the relational way in which we should meet at the table.

I conclude now by quoting a verse I read earlier, which a great teacher from my past, a brother by the name of Ian Lloyd Clarkson, quoted at the conclusion of Pat and my wedding in 1988, a truly Australian Bicentennial Event... and Ian frequently used this text as a Benediction, literally meaning "A Good Word" from the Latin...

Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, And to present you faultless Before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, To God our Saviour, Who alone is wise, Be glory and majesty, Dominion and power, Both now and forever. Amen.

23-07-04 22:02

From the Amplified...

Now to Him who is able to keep you without stumbling, slipping or falling, And to present you unblemished, blameless and faultless Before the presence of His glory in triumphant joy and exultation, with unspeakable, ecstatic delight,

To the one only God, our Saviour through Jesus Christ our Lord, Be glory, splendour, majesty, might, and dominion, and power, and authority, before all time, and now, and forever, unto all the ages of eternity. So Be it. Amen.