

Reading: Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16

It's wonderful today to be able to welcome many from the racing industry and the Riccarton Racecourse in particular.

This parish has a long link with racing. In fact I am reliably told there are no fewer than 32 jockeys buried in the cemetery. This would explain a strange phenomenon I have experienced. Of an evening, just as the sun is going down, when walking through the graveyard, I put my ear to the ground and hear, "Racing this time ..." followed by the thunder of hooves. The link goes further and not just here at St Peter's. The Reverend Riwai Preece was a former jockey who became a priest. At one of his services on the Chatham Islands the congregation was already to start, but he was nowhere to be found. Eventually they found him in the vestry, a transistor radio to his ear, "I'll be with you in a minute," he said, "I just want to hear the end of this race."

We aren't sure who wrote the book of Hebrews from which our second Bible reading came today. While we can't be sure of the author, their message is crystal clear. Have faith in God.

The passage begins with a definition of faith, and then gives us the example of Abraham and Sarah, who stepped out in faith. *Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.* To say that Abraham and Sarah stepped out in faith is a bit of an understatement. They lived in the area of Mesopotamia about the year 2000 BC. The belief in one God was only just emerging out of a whole pantheon of gods. And Abraham received a call from this one God. The call was to go and move his household and enter a new land, and a new family was promised. "Even though you can't see it now," said God, "you and Sarah will have so many offspring that they will outnumber the stars in the sky and the grains of sand on the beach." Today Jews, Muslims and Christians all trace their ancestry back to Abraham making him the spiritual father of over half the world's population.

But what of us? What does faith look like for us? What do we hope for that we can't see? Where are we stepping out in faith?

This community of St Peter's over the last 5 years has faced a choice – a big faith choice. Following the bad damaging of the church building of St Peter's, we could have chosen to say, "It's too hard to restore. It will cost too much. We can't do it." And there were voices that did say this - some in the community. But we have chosen the way of faith. We have chosen to reach beyond what we can see, to restore the building, to return it to its former glory

and to make it even more useful. We have chosen to trust in our God and the generosity of others in order to say, "Yes, we can do it, and we will do it." Like our ancestors in the faith, Abraham and Sarah, we have God's promise to be with us. We know that even though we can't know the future, we have learnt from the past that God is faithful when we take a step of faith.

The early settlers stepped out in faith 164 years ago and set aside land on this site for a church, a vicarage, and a Sunday School. We believe we are honouring their legacy by stepping out once again. To be sure, there are those that find it difficult to trust in God.

I heard the story of family of mice who lived in a large piano. To them in their piano world, came the music of the instrument filling all the dark spaces with sound and harmony. At first the mice were impressed by it. They drew comfort and wonder from the thought that there was Someone who made the music, someone who, though invisible to them, was yet close to them. They loved to think of the Great Player whom they couldn't see. Then one day a daring mouse climbed up part of the piano and returned very thoughtful. She had found how the music was made. Wires where the secret, she said, tightly stretched wires of graduated lengths which trembled and vibrated. We must revise all our old beliefs. None but the most conservative mouse could any longer believe in the Unseen Player. Later, another explorer carried the explanation further; hammers where the secret, numbers of hammers dancing and leaping on the wires. This was a more complicated theory but it all went to show that they lived in a purely mechanical and mathematical world. The explorer mouse said the Great Player was a myth. But all the time the Player played on, and filled their world with music.

This then is our moment to fill our world with music - to fill every dark corner with hope. You see a church building is not just a roof over our heads; it is a sign of Hope to the whole community. To all those who drive past, Hope is alive, Love has a name. We have not dropped the baton. Will the day come when we can gather again in our restored St Peter's? I have faith it will. We have faith it will.

In years to come generations yet unborn will look back on this generation and thank God for our vision and our determination. Like Abraham and Sarah before us, others will say, "They had faith, they did it, we can learn from their example."

I look forward with hope to the day we can return and once again fill the church with prayer and music and be a renewed source of peace, joy and love for our community.