

**Date:** 10 March 2024  
**Services:** *Across the Diocese*  
**Series:** Gazing on the Goodness of God  
**Title:** Faithful  
**Passage:** Exodus 34:4-7; Lamentations 3:22-24

Welcome to week four of our Lenten series, looking at the attributes of God. Today, we focus on God's faithfulness.

The God who is faithful. One of my favourite hymns is "Great Is Thy Faithfulness." "Great Is Thy Faithfulness, oh God my father, there is no shadow of turning with thee, thou changest not, thy compassions they fail not, as thou hast been, thy forever will be great is thy faithfulness. Great Is Thy Faithfulness, more by more new mercies I see, all I have needed thy hand hath provided, Great Is Thy Faithfulness, Lord unto me."

And we love that old hymn. It was written in 1923 by a pastor called Thomas Chisum. Thomas's life was full of sadness, suffering, disappointments, and discouragements. When he sat down to look back on his life and write a hymn about the character of God, the words he chose were "Great Is Thy Faithfulness." That hymn lay in relative obscurity for many years until in the 1950s, Billy Graham picked up that hymn in his Crusades, and it became one of the most popular hymns today because God's faithfulness, God's trustworthiness, his consistency is one of the most beautiful attributes of God.

Exodus 34:6 - "The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness."

Deuteronomy 7:9 - "Know therefore that the Lord your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his Covenant of Love to thousands of generations."

Psalms 117:2 - "The faithfulness of the Lord endures forever."

Hebrews 10:23 - "Let's hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful."

1 Thessalonians 5:4 - "The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it."

So, friends, God is faithful, and those three words are words of great comfort and confidence in our fickle, faithless, and fearful world. Faith is a beautiful word. It means to be dependable, reliable, consistent, and trustworthy. It means to be consistent in character, to be loyal to people and your promises, to be true to your word. It's a beautiful word to be faithful.

But I fear that the word "faithful" is foreign to many of us because we live in a world that is unfaithful. We are surrounded by loved ones who let us down. Maybe you grew up in a family like I did, where your parents rarely kept their word. They said one thing and did another, so you grew up not understanding faithfulness. Maybe at school, you had friends who failed you, who said they would always be by your side, but then they walked away. They were unfaithful.

Maybe you have had a spouse who walked away and caused so much hurt and pain by their unfaithfulness. Maybe you've got a boss who says one thing one day and says another thing the next day, is hot and cold. Or tragically, you may have a church leader who fails to keep their word.

So when we talk about people being faithful or reliable, some of us here are a bit cynical, a bit suspicious, and that is sad. Someone said, "Never expect anything from anyone because they will only let you down." I

find that really sad, church, because just because you've been let down by people, please don't reject this idea of faithfulness.

Think of the people in your life who are reliable, the person who kept turning up when you were not pleasant to be around. They were faithful.

The parent who is always there, the end of the line just to listen and to love you—they are faithful. Or the spouse who forgives you and keeps loving you when you failed them, or keeps their word—they are faithful. I'm deeply thankful for the people in my life who have been faithful and modelled faithfulness to me.

John Markoma says this: when life gets hard, so many of us just bail when it's no longer easy or fun or novel. When it gets difficult or uncomfortable or boring, we just leave. We leave jobs, cities, churches, friendships, marriages. We cut ties and move on. We're a generation raised on text messaging, making flakiness easier than ever before.

Well, God is not like that. God is faithful. God is the only person in your life who will never let you down. God is the only person who will be completely reliable, completely consistent, who never changes and never fails you. God is the only one who is truly faithful.

Numbers 23:19 - "God is not human, that he should lie, not a human being, that he should change his mind. Does God speak and then not act? Does God promise and not fulfill?"

Friends, no matter what you've experienced from people, please believe God is faithful. Someone said, "Whatever happens, God will still be God, and God can still be trusted. God will follow through. God will come through. God will show up because He is faithful."

The word "faithful" is a Hebrew word, EMT. It means truth or reliable or certain or trustworthy. It is the word that we get our word "amen" from—a word of comfort.

Firstly, a word of **comfort** that:

### **1. God's character is unchanging**

God's character is unchanging. God's the same yesterday, today, and forever. That is Hebrews 13:8 - "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. He doesn't change."

Malachi 3:6 - "The Lord, I do not change."

So God is not like me. If I'm honest, I am inconsistent. Hot one day, cold the next. Happy and then sad. Argumentative, grumbling, irritable. People asking, "What have I done?" when the top tip is I'm probably hungry or tired or a bit of both. I change. I'm inconsistent. And so do you. But God doesn't change. "Thou changest not, thy compassions they fail not. As thou hast been, thou forever will be."

Remember our verse for Lent, Exodus 34:6 - "The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness." That is God's self-revelation. That's how God defines himself. Moses has asked to see God's glory, and this is how God describes his goodness, his character, and he describes himself as being faithful. He doesn't describe himself as being angry, volatile, distant, dictatorial. He says, "I'm like a good father—ever-present, ever-patient, always accessible, deeply loving, and consistent and unchanging in my character."

So, God is always compassionate. He always cares for the sufferer. He's always merciful to the sinner. That word "compassion" from week one— that deep-seated, gut-wrenching concern. When Jesus saw the crowd, he saw them as harassed and helpless. They were broken, they were burdened. Whenever God sees us in our brokenness and our heartache, he's always, always full of compassion. That doesn't change.

God is always gracious. Remember that—his costly, undeserved favour. The God who sees us in our sin and invites us to come to him with open arms, free to forgive us, and he holds us and changes us. He sustains us. You can never be afraid that if you go to God and confess your sin, that he will not forgive you because his blood has been shed at Calvary, and he's going to be faithful to that promise to forgive you.

God is always patient, always slow to anger—remember that from week three—that he is long nostril, his long-fused. It takes a long time for his anger to flare up; he doesn't flare off the handle. So when we stuff up and when we go to God, he is patient with us.

God's always loving. The word for love in this verse is a word hesed. It means this covenantal love, not just a feeling, but who God is in his character. I hope you know that God loves you—not because of what you do. We often say, "God loves me because I... No, it's because God loves me I do this or because God loves me I am this." So the love of God is always there, steadfast, loyal, committed, devoted love. I could go on.

God is always just; he's always kind. This is the comfort when we've been wronged, when we've been wounded. God is always the same. So perhaps you too remember what God is like.

There was a study done with the National Geographic magazine on the memory span of animals, and the average length of memories of 150 different animals was 27 seconds—27 seconds before they forget something, in one ear and out the next. We've got to remember that, not forget that God's character never changes. He is the same yesterday, today, forever. He'll always be compassionate, gracious, patient, loving, forgiving, no matter what's happening in your life. God has not changed.

I don't know, perhaps need to meditate more on God's character. I love memorizing scripture. Deuteronomy 33:27 - "The Eternal God is our refuge, and underneath are his everlasting arms." Psalm 46:1 - "God is our strength and our refuge, and ever-present help in trouble." That doesn't change when I do that. I learn to see God's character in all these different seasons. I see his compassion, I see his grace, I see his strength. And when I don't feel it, I press into it because I know it's still true of God even if I don't feel it. I look back and I say, "Well, God has been faithful. He was faithful when I was 21; he was faithful when I'm 40. He's the same God, so he'll still be faithful when I'm 80."

Or perhaps we need to stop looking for comfort in all the wrong things with people who let us down. Gladys Aylward was a missionary in China in World War II, and when the Japanese attacked, she fled overnight with a hundred orphans. They're in the mountains, and they are scared. And she woke up the next morning thinking, "We are fearing for our safety." And this 13-year-old girl came up to Gladys and said this: "Remember Moses. Remember how God divided the Red Sea for Moses." And Gladys said to the 13-year-old girl, "But I'm not Moses." And the girl said, "Of course you're not Moses, but God is still God, and God hasn't changed. God is still God, and God has not changed." So remember that his character is always consistent—that's the comfort.

Number two, the **confidence** that

## **2. His promises are always true.**

His promises are always true. God is true to his word. God says what he means, and he means what he says.

Psalm 33:4 - "For the word of the Lord is right and true; he is faithful in all he does." Psalm 119:89-90 - "Your word, O Lord, is eternal; it stands firm in the heavens. Your faithfulness continues through all generations." So because God is faithful, every word he says is reliable, and he will keep his word. I find that liberating because there's no second-guessing with God. There's no miscommunication, there's no trying to read the tone or discern his motivation. God is 100% reliable in everything he says in his word.

And this—the Bible, this is the breath, that word of God. This is God's word. Not what some Christian leader says, not what some Christian book says, but what God says. And because God is faithful, we just sit under his word, not over his word, and judge it and decide which bit we like and don't like. Sit under the word. Don't twist it, don't alter it. Just sit under it, immerse yourself in it, and say, "This is the word of God, and God is faithful to his promises."

So, imagine if you drove up to your local church every week, but instead of going to church, you went next door to the cafe or the restaurant. You walk into your cafe and restaurant every single week at, say, 10:00 a.m. in the morning, and the waiter said, "Oh, what would you like?" And you say, "I don't care, just feed me." So, she brings this meal, and then you say, "Actually, I can't be bothered to feed myself. Could you please feed me?" So, you just sit back and open your mouth, and she just shovels the food into your mouth. And then you get back into your car and drive home again, and you eat nothing for seven days, and come back to that same restaurant the following Sunday at 10:00 a.m. and say to the waitress, "Oh, just feed me. Just shovel what you want down my throat."

And I think we'd say to that person, "That is crazy. You need to learn to feed yourself." And yet, many Christians I meet do exactly the same with the word of God. They come to church every Sunday and expect the pastor or the minister to shovel the word down their throat, and that's the only spiritual meal they have all week. And they turn up the following Sunday and just expect them to shovel that word down after it again. And we should learn to feed ourselves on the word of God because these are the promises of God that he is faithful to. And our confidence is that these words will not change. Every promise God has made, he will keep. Isn't that remarkable? We make all kinds of promises, but we often don't keep them. Sometimes we make promises that we are incapable of keeping. Well, God keeps all his promises, even the seemingly impossible.

You remember when God promised Abraham that he'd have as many descendants as the stars in the sky, and it seemed crazy because Abraham was 75 and Sarah was 65, and they weren't able to have kids. But Abraham believed God. He took God at his word. He had confidence that God would be faithful, and God kept his word. Oh, it took 25 years, but God did keep his promise. So, when you believe God is faithful, it changes your walk with Jesus.

Here's just a few promises that God has made that he is faithful to: the promise of Pardon. 1 John 1 - "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just, and he will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." That's the promise that Jesus paid for our sins once for all at Calvary on that cross. There's no more to pay. We really are pardoned. We really are not guilty in his sight. We are completely, freely forgiven. That's the promise. There's no catch. So, when you come and confess your sins, God is faithful. He has forgiven you. So, please don't hold on to your hurts and your guilt. Trust that he has forgiven you.

The promise of God's provision: Philippians 4:19 - "And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus." Not everything we want, but everything we need. God has promised he will meet all of our needs. Just because we haven't got what we want right now doesn't mean that God has been unfaithful. God may not do exactly what we want to do in our timing, but he will always give exactly what we need. I love in Matthew 6 where he's talking about the birds of the air, and God provides for their needs. He feeds them and he uses the word "your," "he your heavenly father." Because he's not the bird's

heavenly father, he's the bird's God, but he's your heavenly father. And if he's your heavenly father, he will provide what you need.

The promise of God's presence: What does the hymn say? "Thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide." Deuteronomy 31:8 - "The Lord himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you, he will never forsake you. Don't be afraid and don't be discouraged." Or, as 41:10 says, "Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, I will help you, and I will uphold you with my righteous right hand." We've got to believe that God is always will and always is with us. That promise is true. He never leaves us. I don't always know what God is doing, but I know that I'm never alone.

There's a story of a boy who was flying a kite, and a man walked past. The kite had gone behind the clouds, and this boy is standing there doing this. The man said, "What are you doing?" and the boy said, "I'm flying a kite." The man said, "I can't see a kite," and the boy replied, "No, no, no. I can't see it either; it's behind the clouds." He said, "How do you know?" The boy said, "Because from time to time, I feel a tug on the strings, and I know the kite's still there."

And that's like me and God. Sometimes, I don't feel His presence, but I know He's still there. I can't see it, sometimes, I know He's still there because I feel the tugs on the strings. The person that He sends my way to sit and to comfort and to cry with me, He's faithful. Then the person who sent me a text of scripture to remind me that God is still good and God is still with me. That's the promise that He will never leave me, never forsake me. Even when I am weak, His strength is sufficient for me.

The promise of God's plan: I've met that person who plans their life in meticulous detail, the exact plan. But a few months later, those plans have changed because life doesn't always turn out the way that you want. We don't know what will happen tomorrow, but God does, and God is faithful to His plan for your life. He doesn't tell you the details, but He does tell you the purpose. What is God's plan for your life? One Thessalonians 4 - "It is God's will that you are sanctified." Or 1 Thessalonians 5:23 - "May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul, and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and He will do it."

God's plan is to make sure that you're more and more like Christ, ready for the day that you meet Him. And God is faithful to that promise. He will sanctify you, and He will keep you. Yet often, God uses hardships and pain and trial to make us more like Jesus, but He'll never let you go. You know, the one who began a good work will bring it to completion until the day of Christ. What God started in you, He will finish. I love that God didn't get halfway through the cross and then say, "Well, that's it; I give up." No, He said, "It is finished." God is faithful to all His promises.

D.L. Moody says, "God never made a promise that was too good to be true. We don't know how God's going to keep them; we don't know what He's going to take us through. But when we know that God is faithful, we take hold of those promises and we live by them, and we stand firm in them. That's our confidence."

So friends will fail you, but God is faithful. Families will let you down, but God is faithful. Feelings will fail you, but God is faithful. That comfort that God's character is unchanging and that confidence that God's promises are always true.

And I'll finish with this short challenge: we are called to be faithful because our God is faithful. If we follow a faithful God, we should be known for our faithfulness, our reliability, our consistency, our trustworthiness, our dependency. Mother Teresa said, "We are not called to be successful, but we are called to be faithful." And wouldn't it be great this Lent time if we were known for our consistency and our reliability and our faithfulness? And people will say, "Oh, they are faithful because their God is faithful."

So, God is faithful—a beautiful word, always consistent, always trustworthy, always reliable, always dependable, and always true. "Great is thy faithfulness, O God, my Father; there is no shadow of changing within. Thou changest not; thy compassions they fail not. As thou hast been, thou forever will be."

Amen.