

We Must Have Faith Lynell AlJoe-Thurman

A sermon preached at Emanuel Lutheran Church, Corning, New York, and Our Saviour's Lutheran Church, Horseheads, New York, Sunday, August 12, 2007.

Scripture: Luke 12:32-40; Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16

Let us pray:

God and gracious God, endless are your love and mercy for each of us. I ask that you send you Holy Spirit to stir our hearts and to make us living witnesses to your gospel. For you, Lord, are the true Bread of Life that came down from heaven and died on the cross for our sins. We are not worthy to receive, yet you continue to give us all that is needed, and we are thankful. You are the author and finisher of our faith. Give us your peace, make us good stewards, and surround us with your love, the purest love of all. Help us to understand that you walk beside us as we journey here on earth. Amen.

Children of God, hear the words of the Hebrew recital of the faith, based upon Israel's ancestors, and understand that our faith is more than the history of others—it is a reminder of God's promises to us as a community of faith gathered here in Horseheads/ Corning, New York:

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. Indeed, by faith our ancestors received approval. By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible. By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to set out for a place that he was to receive as an inheritance; and he set out, not knowing where he was going. (Heb. 11:1-3, 8)

Abraham journeyed to an unfamiliar territory with all that he had and something more powerful than what he could have possibly understood at the time, and that was the trust that God would be faithful to him. "Abraham and Sarah exemplify the vision of faith that people of God need in every age. Their hope and trust in God's promise allowed them to face an unknown future" (*Sunday and Seasons*, 2007, page 231).

Today, we gather as a community of faith and seek renewed vision, so that we might make our way more boldly into the world as bearers of God's saving love. With just words, God created the world and everything that is in it. He made the universe and everything that there is in it. He scooped down and made human out of the dust of the earth. We were perfect, but over time because of sin we became, well, pretty imperfect. By the waters of Baptism our old Adam (Eve) dies and a new being is created. Still, as we journey, imperfection and sin surround us, just as God's grace stands before us.

We have **faith** to believe that, one day, because of God's divine will and his endless love for us, we too will be like Jesus and become perfect at our resurrection. But until we get to

heaven, we have to faithfully walk with Christ here on earth. The journey will not be easy—we were never promised that it would be. We will have mountains to climb, valleys to go through, hills one right after another. A few pebbles will get in our shoes and there will be streets and avenues that we will cross with trepidation. Things will get rough; but fear not, you are not alone. God is with you.

The things we encounter on this journey—if we are not rooted and grounded in God’s words and if we do not have a sincere, balanced prayer life—would make us writhe with shame or ball up in a corner and die. What keeps us upright is to know that God carries us when we can no longer walk and have the weight of the world on our shoulders.

Sometimes, when we look at Hebrews and see how our ancestors in Christ believed and depended upon God’s words of promise, we forget to add ourselves in the picture. We do not see that what God did for them, he is able to do for us. We witness in hearing the Word of God that sometimes what had originally been planned was often revamped, redirected, or changed. Some of the things—the blessings, the events that took place—involved having faith, confidence about things that could not be presently verified. Sounds familiar, does it?

Sometimes we are at wits ends, and that is when the Holy Spirit steps in. We must have faith. Martin Luther stated that our faith should not solely be based on the knowledge of history but the trust factor in the promise of God. Here is his quote: “Hebrews teaches us that faith is not only a matter of historical knowledge, but a matter of having confidence in God to receive his promise.” He goes on to say that, “Augustine also reminds us that we should understand the word ‘faith’ in Scripture to mean confidence in God—that God is gracious to us—and not merely such knowledge of these stories.”

This means that we ourselves should know without a shadow of doubt that God is gracious to us, just as he was gracious to Sarah and Abraham, the children of Israel, the prophets of old, and those within the New Testament, as well as each and every one us today. Yes, Abraham’s call to go to a new land and the promise of multiplying his seed to match the number of stars or the grains of sand was more than he could imagine, but the God that we serve ranks over Abraham’s and our human concepts. Everything that God promised Abraham came to pass, even when it was not realized while Abraham walked the earth (both things actually occurred after his death).

Everything that God has promised us will be. So, fear not, little flock. Be of good courage. True faith will allow us to fear less. Abraham took a walk on the faith side, and boy, was it adventuresome. We know some of these stories, but if we fast-forward thousands of years to our time in this place, just how does our text speak to us?

We too often become consumed with fear. Our fears are based upon little more than our human concept of things that we try to fit neatly into little boxes placed in our cobwebbed minds. Instead of us looking at the possibilities of what could be if we only trust in God’s promises and understand that God is pleased with those who trust in him, we fill ourselves with misconceptions and doubt. We allow Satan and negative influences to control our trust in the one who created all out of nothing.

Our Gospel text tells us not to fear, for it is God's good pleasure to give us the kingdom (Luke 12:32-40). I say fear not, children of the Most High, because when we cast all of our cares upon God and when we have the confidence to know that God's will will be done despite our disbeliefs and negative actions, we become like God intended us to be.

The good news for us today is that God's will is to save, to restore, to make whole, to mend the broken, and to show us that he is with us even in the midst of circumstances that may come our way. Our Creator journeys beside us as we go through all of our trials and tribulations. He wipes away our tears and holds our hands. God walks beside us in the midst of confusion. We have to believe and have faith in him, even when we cannot see a clear path, even when we tread in muddy waters.

May each of us realize that our hearts must rejoice in God, as we hope in the one who gave us Jesus Christ, until the end when he welcomes us with open arms and says, "Well done, welcome home."

Now let all believers say amen, amen, and amen.

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