

Sermon for The 12th Sunday after Pentecost

Date: August 14, 2022

Location: St. John's Lutheran Church, Austin, MN

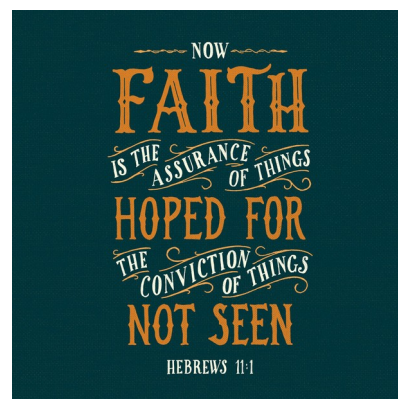
Old Testament: Jeremiah 23:16-29

Epistle Reading: Hebrews 11:17-12:3

Gospel Reading: Luke 12:49-56

Sermon Text: Hebrews 11:17-12:3

Sermon Title: Faith is the Foundation of our Salvation



Introit: Psalm 55:1,12-14; Antiphon Psalm 55:22

Hymns:

LSB 801 – How Great Thou Art

LSB 702 – My Faith Looks Up To Thee

LSB 575 – My Hope is Built on Nothing Less

Liturgy:

Divine Service III, p. 184

Songs:

Our God is an awesome God - Mullins

Don't Tread On Me - We The Kingdom

Hope Is Here - This Hope

Liturgy:

Creative Worship



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Text: Hebrews 11:17—12:3

By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, of whom it was said, “Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.” He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back. By faith Isaac invoked future blessings on Jacob and Esau. By faith Jacob, when dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, bowing in worship over the head of his staff. By faith Joseph, at the end of his life, made mention of the exodus of the Israelites and gave directions concerning his bones.

By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents, because they saw that the child was beautiful, and they were not afraid of the king’s edict. By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward. By faith he left Egypt, not being afraid of the anger of the king, for he endured as seeing him who is invisible. By faith he kept the Passover and sprinkled the blood, so that the Destroyer of the firstborn might not touch them.

By faith the people crossed the Red Sea as if on dry land, but the Egyptians, when they attempted to do the same, were drowned. By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for seven days. By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had given a friendly welcome to the spies.

And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets— who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. Women received back their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated— of whom the world was not worthy—wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.

And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.

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Grace, peace and mercy be to you in Jesus' name. Amen.

The first half of Hebrews 11 teaches us what faith is. Faith assures us of things we expect, and convinces us of the existence of things we cannot see.¹ We have so many examples of strong, powerful faith in Scripture. Faith that is unyielding, wielding great and awesome power. Today as we look at Hebrews 11, the author is giving us a list of those many examples. He lists many names. Some you might recognize, others maybe not, but all of them are found in the Bible and provide powerful examples of what it means to have faith in the one, true, holy, living, triune God.

They based their faith on the foundation of the Christ, the Messiah. They are Christians. That might sound strange to you at first. How can we call people who lived long before Jesus was born Christians? To understand that let me give you a small lesson in Greek and Hebrew. Christ is a Greek word, it means Messiah. Messiah is a Hebrew word, it means The Anointed One. Both Christ and Messiah mean the same thing. Those people who lived during Old Testament times believed in God's promise that a Messiah would come. They believed the Anointed One would come to save them. Who is the Anointed One? Jesus the Christ. They did not know His name, like we do, but they knew He was coming. They believed God's promise that the Christ would come. They were Christ-ians – Christians.

The author of Hebrews states it clearly. He writes

Moses thought that being insulted for Christ would be better than having the treasures of Egypt. He was looking ahead to his reward.²

Moses lived nearly 2,000 years before Jesus, but was called a Christian by the author of this letter to the Hebrews, written shortly after Jesus walked the Earth with us. He could do that because Moses, and all of those other faithful people, believed in the exact same promise we do. Their faith was founded on the exact same thing. The promise that our salvation comes solely, wholly, and only through the only One that redeems us from any and every sin. They believed that same One makes us perfect and holy before our Heavenly Father. They believe it is not by our might but by God's might alone that we are saved.³

What is a Christian? A Christian is one who believes in the salvation God has won for us, through His Son. A person who is sustained and preserved in that faith by the power of the Holy Spirit. They, way back then, were Christians. Those

1 Hebrews 11:1
2 Hebrews 11:26
3 Zechariah 4:6

ancient people listed in this letter, and those to whom the letter was written, along with the faithful among us today, are members of the same one true Holy Church of believers. We are all members in Christ of those called the children of God.

That is what enabled them to stand where no one else would or could. Faith is the source of our strength. You see this letter was written to people who were enduring terrible persecution. They were often living in fear for their lives. Fear that tempted them to abandon the true faith for any other lie, because the lie gave the impression of peace. The promise of false peace. Peace that does not last. Peace that, if found, is only found this side of the Narrow Door.⁴

In London, during World War II, an attack by bombers left a neighborhood in flames. One young boy could not escape the burning house and was forced up to the roof. The rest of his family escaped through the door. The low light of the approaching dawn allowed the father to see his son on the roof but the smoke made it impossible for the boy to see the ground. The father shouted up to his boy, “Son, jump down. I will catch you.”

The boy cried back, “But I can’t see you.”

The father responded, “I can see you, and that is what matters.”

That is the root of the message in the book of Hebrews. God wants us to rely on Him. To be able to live a life free of fear we must trust in Him. Faith is what allows us to approach death peacefully. Because we know though we cannot see where we are going, and we do not know how to get there, God can see us and He has promised He will be there to catch us as we fall into His arms.

It is that same peace we will have as we stand before His throne. Each of us will stand completely alone before a Holy Almighty God. It is faith in His promises to save you that will give you peace at that moment. How different for those who have no faith. Back in August of 2010 there was man in the news named Christopher Hitchens. He was a fairly well known journalist who regularly proclaimed his narrow minded view that all Christians are ignorant. In his last interview before he died he boldly proclaimed, “The only way I’d change my mind about God is if I am terribly ill, half demented, and have no control over what I am saying.”⁵

His faith in himself was only a cover to the fear that held him. In his arrogance he would not listen to the Holy Spirit’s constant call. A short time later Christopher Hitchens died. As he did his blustery words and sarcastic demeaning

4 Luke 13:24

5 <http://www.christianpost.com/article/20100807/hitchens-certain-he-wont-turn-to-god-while-lucid/index.html>

insults bought him nothing. He did, like we will, stand alone before God's throne. The difference is he stood utterly alone.⁶ He heard, "I never knew you."⁷ Nothing spared him from the unending nightmare that waited for him. He did his best to tell the whole world he was not afraid. Shakespeare succinctly said it, "Me thinks he dost protest too much."⁸

All the noise he made says something. It says the truth is the truth, and we all recognize it. We were made in the image and likeness of God.⁹ Although that image is corrupted by the affects of sin it still remains. We know the truth when we see it. Sometimes we simply choose to deny it, even when it is staring us in the face. We do that because the world and its toys distracts us and pulls us away from God, pulls us away form Jesus with the attitude, "I'll get the Jesus later, when I have time."

That is the point in the letter to the Hebrews. Faith is found in truth. The truth is God's Holy Word, and God's holy promises, and God's holy innocent bitter suffering and death, His resurrection from the dead, and the proclamation that all authority in Heaven and on Earth now belongs to Him.¹⁰ That is the truth. No matter how vengefully the world or individuals rail against it.

There is a band called Guns and Roses. From its name you might be able to guess that it is a rock band. Some years ago they recorded a song by Bob Dylan called, "Knockin' on Heavens Door." The music world rose up in a rage. There were rumors going around that Guns and Roses had become Christian. MTV news was trying to get an interview. Fans threatened to boycott concerts. Everyone wanted to know had they become Christian?

Now you should know there is nothing particularly Christian about that song. There's really not much to the song at all but you would have thought they had just helped out with the latest Billy Graham crusade. The stir was intense. Eventually the band made a formal statement. "We just like Bob Dylan, and wanted to honor him by singing one of his songs. Relax everyone we're not going Christian!" There was a collective gasp of relief. What is more sad is people in church act that same way. We don't want too much Jesus. Like Grandpa Walton they say, "Church is for Sunday morning."

Can you see how the world grasps onto anything because they really have nothing? People will concentrate and focus on their music over their saving Lord.

6 Matthew 10:32-33

7 Matthew 7:23

8 Hamlet Act 3, scene 2

9 Genesis 1:26

10 Matthew 28:18

They make music their God and God plays second fiddle. The world was terrified that one of their heroes had fallen. Terrified their hero had become the worst thing of all – Christian. That was the one thing they could not endure. I assure you if Guns and Roses had become any other religion there would have been little or no outcry at all but Christianity was intolerable.

You can find the same thing in churches. There the Word of God is read, preached and taught, and people sitting there reject it. When they are warned repeatedly they do everything in their power to silence the voices that speak. Their end will be their own fault.

Why? Because the truth is the truth even if you don't want it to be. The truth rings loudly in the ears of God's children even when they have utterly rejected Him. Lucifer himself cannot endure it. That is why Jesus called him the father of lies.¹¹ He cannot stomach the truth. Neither can those who have been trapped by his lies, and that is why the world rages when it hears it.

The letter to the Hebrews says let them rail. Let them rage. Let them shout and insult you. Let them imprison and kill you, but do not let go of the truth." The people to whom he was writing were enduring all kinds of fears. The only hope for real lasting peace in their lives was to believe any lie. They could return to the old Jewish faith in sacrifices. They could call Caesar god. They could be anything except Christian and they would be fine.

They could go back to living their life as they had. They could go back to buying the nicer things in the market place, rather than being able to deal with only those select few who were willing to sell to "those kind of people." You know Christians. They could go back to their synagogues and see their old friends again. They could enjoy life again. The letter to the Hebrews says the same thing Jesus taught, "Store up for yourselves treasures in Heaven."¹²

Those treasures are found here. They are found in God's Holy Word, Holy Baptism and Holy Communion. They are found by those who come here to receive those things. They are not found by those who sit in pews playing with distractions.

The long list of faithful heroes given in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews was provided because all of these people had to endure hardships. They had to endure dangers. They had to endure persecution, trials and tribulations. These ancient people were heroes, and are to us still today, not because they were such great people themselves. In fact you don't have to look very hard to see everyone of them had weakness to sin. Everyone of them failed. Yet everyone of them was used

11 John 8:44

12 Matthew 6:19-20

by God to do extraordinary things because they believed and would not yield to the worlds temptations and offerings.

That is what makes them heroes. That is why we look up to them. That is why we hold them in high esteem, in spite of their sin. They are heroes to us because they, like us, were covered in sin, born in sin, stained with sin. They, like us, were made clean not because of their great works but because of God's great works in them. Because God had declared them holy, the same exact way He declares you holy, sinless and perfect in His sight.

Through faith. Faith that the Holy Spirit works in you and keeps in you. Faith that is fed on the very Word of God and the precious Body and Blood of Christ. Faith that in the end will save you because ultimately it is faith God has placed in you, not faith you have worked up for yourself. Our salvation is based on God's work. We learn of that through God's Word. We believe in that because of God's free gift of faith.

A free gift that was given to you. That gift is salvation. A salvation that promises an eternal life free of trial, free of pain, free of anything and everything that causes us grief in this life. A free gift that tells you a time is coming when you will be able to walk and talk with God face to face. A free gift that is for us, as it was for them, the comfort in the storm.

Comfort in Jesus' name.

Amen.

Proclaim God's Word,
Encourage one another in faith,
Witness to God's love and
Serve all people

