

21st Sunday after Trinity: October 21, 2018

“Idle-less Faith”

Grace, Mercy, and Peace be unto you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. Our text for this morning is our Gospel lesson, John 4, “**John 4:46-50.**”

We have before us the second sign in John, the first being the turning water wine at the wedding feast, which is recorded in John 2. This sets the stage for today. Jesus did His first sign, after which He went to Capernaum, then to Jerusalem. After spending some time there, He traveled throughout the Judean countryside, as well as through Samaria, before He turns back to go to Galilee. The last time He was here, a great miracle happened. In this small town, news had traveled fast, and Cana had become a growing attraction. One could travel there and walk the same road, touch the same pot, sit at the same table, and breathe the same air as the celebrity Jesus. Faith needed something upon which to hang its hat, so many would travel in hopes that these things would somehow strengthen their faith, and make them feel better.

It is here, where we meet a man, a court official, most likely from the royal court of Herod Anitpas, or a relative of the royal family. This was not a quick trip down the road. It was quite a task for this man to set out to Cana in Galilee, and with a sick kid no less! He heard of Jesus and the miracle at Cana. He was hoping there was something left in Cana, maybe the healer was still there; maybe there was some answer to fix his child. So in faith, he goes. No doubt his faith is tested on the way. For sure, it is tested by Jesus Himself. Jesus receives the request of this man, and instantly accuses him of shallow faith, “Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe.”

This is the very nature of faith. It is a living, active, always moving thing. Faith either increases as it is nurtured and fed, or it regresses as it gets sick, weak, frail, and in fear of death. There is a weird understanding of faith that is perpetrated by the sinful nature, bolstered by the adversary, and fortified by the world; that is faith is a possession. It is understood, by many, that faith is something that is given and you possess it like a gold coin. The best way to keep it, is to put it in a treasure chest, bury it in the sand, paint a big red X over the spot and draw a map so you don't forget where it is. This is not faith. This is a lifeless notion of God. It is a wish of who you want God to be. This is not faith, it is a super-secret weapon that only can be used by the diamond in the rough.

Faith is not simply an inanimate object. Faith is living, it has to be. It is not the nature of the enemy to be idle. My sinful nature is constantly attacking my thoughts, my words, and my actions towards you. The devil's custom is not to sit and scheme, "***Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.***"¹ The Christian cannot sit around hearing and doing nothing. It behooves you to consider how you may fortify yourself. We heard from Ephesians, "***For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places;***"² Those are some serious enemies.

The devil howls and rages at the Lord's Supper. He is keen on destroying the Word, under-cutting, under-mining, dividing and conquering wherever he can get a nose. He taunts you to live as he does. He tempts you to use your words and actions to further build his kingdom. As we get ready to discuss matters at our voter's meeting this morning, we do well to be wary of our own glory and pride. We seek to honor God's Kingdom, which speaks only one word: His. When it comes to man's word, different doesn't make it wrong; it just makes it different.

But it is not just in meetings, our entire lives are beset by these attacks. I love how Luther said it, "*When, therefore, the fire of faith is kindled and burns, and the devil feels it and becomes aware of it, he immediately grasps it with all his cunning, for he knows how his kingdom is endangered by it. Therefore he endeavors with great zeal to protect his kingdom, and exerts himself to retain all under his obedience. Certain it is, therefore, that, when a person begins to believe, temptation and persecution will be sure closely to follow him; and if this does not occur, it is a sign his faith is not true and he has not tightly apprehended the Gospel. For that rogue, the devil, has a sharp vision and easily becomes conscious of the presence of a true Christian. Therefore he exerts himself to entrap him, and surrounds and attacks him on all sides; for he cannot bear that anyone should desert his kingdom. Therefore it is dangerous to live heedlessly, for the devil is likely to take us by surprise.*"³

We have many examples in Scripture recorded for our learning. Adam talked with God,

¹ 1 Peter 5:8

² Ephesians 6:12

³ Sermons by Martin Luther, edited and translated by John Nicholas Lenker, Volume 5, "Twenty-First Sunday after Trinity; Second Sermon: John 4:46-54, pg. 233.

yet came to ruin by a deceptive word of the adversary. Moses spoke with God face-to-face, yet succumbed to reason and carnal thoughts at the rock; fearing the unbelief of the people would dampen the sign and water would not flow. Aaron spoke with Pharaoh and was the instrument by which many plagues came upon Egypt. He walked through the Red Sea with walls of water on either side, yet loved the word of the people to build a false god, one they could see. Peter, was strong in faith. He walked on the water with Jesus, yet when the wind and storm arose, he forgot the Word and he lost faith. Satan was given an opening by Peter and faith was torn out. Brothers and sisters, what do we learn? Faith is a tender thing. We so easily make a mistake and are liable to stumble, but the devil is watchful, and prowls. Unless you exercise watchfulness, are constant in God's Word and prayer, the adversary quickly sees his advantage.

Faith can have only one object. It cannot come from inside myself. It must come from without. Faith can only depend on Christ. The man sought Jesus. He regarded Christ as the only one who could help his son. When challenged about seeking a sign from God, the man persevered in faith. He expected all good and every benefit from Christ. The trial caused the man to stumble; no doubt he felt hurt. There was a rise to an element of doubt and the fiery arrows slung by Satan rang loudly, "That's it guy. Go back home. He's not going to help you. All of this was for naught. He doesn't really care. It is all a façade."

But the man, by God's grace in the Holy Spirit, was not ready to sink. He was not driven away to despair. The voice of God spoke more loudly. "***Lord, come before my child dies.***"⁴ His faith was still weak. He did not realize Jesus had the power to heal without being present. Jesus does not forsake this man. He simply does the same, as He does for you; He speaks. Our outer nature is wasting away, but our inner nature is being renewed day by day. These slight momentary afflictions are preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.

Our flesh looks at this earth and sees death and pain, and so we are not driven to despair, God gives us faith. We see not as the world sees, "***Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified.***"⁵ The Word who calls all things into being, is the same Word who speaks life for this man's son, is the same Word who became flesh and was crucified for you.

⁴ John 4:49

⁵ 1 Corinthians 1:22–23

It is the same Word who died and rose for your life. It is the same Word who joined Himself to water and birthed you in the family of God. It is the same Word who speaks life to you. It is the same Word who joins Himself to bread and wine and distributes His body and His blood for the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation.

Faith is given life and is sustained by this Word. Faith is seen just as this man sees, “***The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and went on his way.***”⁶ Faith hears the Word of the Lord, and simply believes it. There is no hidden meaning. There is no secret club or hierarchy where you move up the ladder to get the “real story.” God’s salvation does not operate in secret, so that your faith may be strengthened. Faith rests its hat on only one thing: Jesus. Here He is in His Word, He speaks to you, even today. Here He is in baptism. He will never forsake you, as your baptism goes with you wherever you go. Here He is on this altar, feeding you for when you go on your way.

It matters not whether faith is strong or weak; it matters if it is present. God continues to deal with us in ways that our arrogance may be put down, our pride may be stifled, and our belief in self-superiority may be crushed and brought to nothing. Like Job, He may trim the hedges of protection and give the adversary a better shot, but this is all done for your good. It is done for your faith, so that it may flee directly to Christ. While we battle not against flesh and blood, consider them simple military exercises, where the bugs can get worked out and faith is strengthened in Christ.

“Though great our sins, yet greater still Is God’s abundant favor; His hand of mercy never will Abandon us, nor waver. Our shepherd good and true is He, Who will at last His Israel free From all their sin and sorrow.”⁷ Amen.

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

⁶ John 4:50

⁷ From Depths of Woe I Cry to Thee, LSB 607:5

Prayer of the Church
Twenty-first Sunday after Trinity
21 October 2018

Let us pray for the whole Church of God in Christ Jesus and for all people according to their needs. For the priesthood of the baptized, that through the ongoing reception of the Holy Word and Sacraments, their faith in the Lord's promises would be increased, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For this congregation, and for all congregations in our Synod, that they would be blessed with pastors who preach the whole counsel of God and parishioners who hear and believe, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For an increase of workers sent out to serve in the Lord's vineyard of grace, that the proclamation of repentance and the forgiveness of sins in Christ's name would be heard by all sinners, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For protection against the schemes of the devil, that God's children would, by the power of the Spirit, don the whole armor of God to withstand all demonic assaults and remain steadfast in the Word, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For those who live without faith in Christ, that the Holy Spirit would call them to repentance and grant them a confident trust in Jesus, who lived and died for them and all sinners, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For a culture of life to spread throughout our land, that all life from the womb to the grave would be cherished and protected, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For those whom God has placed in authority over us, that they would serve with integrity and honor, striving for peace and the collective good of all, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For those whom God has granted another year of earthly life, especially His servants *Hailey*; that she may grow in wisdom and grace, and that God would strengthen her trust in His goodness all the days of her life; let us pray to the Lord; **Lord have mercy.**

For the joy and blessings that God has granted *Keith & Helen, Troy & Kistie, Duane & Cindy* during the years of their marriage; that God would assist them always by His grace that with true fidelity and steadfast love they may ever honor and keep their marriage vows, grow in love towards Him and for each other, and come at last to the eternal joys that He have promised; let us pray to the Lord; **Lord have mercy.**

For all who are sick or suffering in any way, and for all who have requested our prayers, [*including Carmen and Amber,*] that they would be relieved of their afflictions, according to the Lord's will, or strengthened to endure, and for those who mourn, [*especially the family of Charlie*], that they would find comfort in the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

Into Your hands, O Lord, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in Your mercy, through Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. **Amen.**