

“Faith: the Virtue of Trusting God”

Date: August 16, 2020

Place: Lakewood UMC

Texts: Luke 6:43-45; Ephesians 2:8-10 Themes: Faith, Trust

Occasion: Virtues sermon series

During the past four weeks we have been dealing with what are called the cardinal virtues: wisdom, courage, justice and temperance. The word *cardinal* comes from Latin meaning hinge. Early philosophers contended that all other virtues hinge on these four.

For the Christian, there is another perspective to looking at virtues. So, to these four were added the *theological* virtues: faith, hope and love. These 7 have been seen as the classic virtues. These seven virtues are the tools of the moral life, determining our goodness and virtue.

Paul named the theological virtues at the close of his magnificent hymn on love in 1 Corinthians 13. “And now faith, hope and love abide, these three, and the greatest of these is love.” (vs. 13) In the coming weeks we’ll look at the virtues of love and hope but today we want to look at faith.

The essence of faith is trust. The Christian faith is more than believing; it is belief plus to trust. To have faith in Jesus Christ is to be willing to trust our lives to Him, both in this life and the life to come.

I am reminded of something I did when I was on a canoe trip in the wilderness area known as Algonquin in Canada. I was on a trip sponsored by our annual conference and there was a group of about ten of us – canoeing, camping, cooking outdoors and enjoying the beauty of this wild area. I got to see the Milky Way for the first time, the sky was so clear and I heard the cry of wolves off in the distance one night. It was an incredible experience.

One day we came upon an island that had very tall cliffs. The trip leader had us all get out of our boats and climb to the top of one of the cliffs, about 20-30 feet tall. He told us one of the traditions of this adventure was to invite people to jump off the cliff into the water below. It was certainly deep enough and the area was clear of any rocks that would hurt us.

Several people jumped off the cliff into the cold water below. Then it was my turn. I am not particularly fond of heights, but there was something exciting about this challenge. I stood on the edge and looked down below.

I had heard the information that it was safe. But now I had to make a decision. Would I trust the water to be safe? I took a leap of faith and jumped. I yelled with excitement on my way down and before I knew it I plunged several feet into the depths of the water, and quickly returned to the surface. What a thrill. I wanted to do it again.

Faith is not a blind decision; it is informed by knowledge. But it goes a step further and asks the person to trust what they say they believe. I told myself that jumping would be safe, but the decision to jump was matter of faith. Did I truly believe what I told myself?

My friends, our faith in God and the Lord Jesus Christ is very similar. It is informed by our knowledge of the Bible, by what others have told us, and what we have heard when going to church. But still it comes down to this – “Do I trust, deep within my soul?”

Faith is more than saying “I believe;” it then asks the question, do you trust; do you trust your life with God? It’s not enough simply to have the head knowledge. Many people say, “Oh yeah, I believe there’s a God.” But they don’t yet have faith, because they haven’t learned to trust. Faith is that vital connection to God through Jesus Christ.

For the Christian, faith is the virtue that enables all of the other virtues. If we are going to bear the fruit of the spirit, faith is the tap root of any tree hoping to bear spiritual fruit. We need that connection to God. Our moral goodness comes not from ourselves but flows from God.

In Hebrews 11:6 it says “Without faith it is impossible to please God.” Faith, that trusting relationship with God, is the foundation of the moral life. In our passage from Ephesians we heard Paul telling the church at Ephesus: “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God – not the result of works, so that no one may boast.”

Paul insists we can never be good enough, never holy enough, never loving enough to deserve God’s grace. His argument is that God’s grace is not earned or deserved, it is given. We receive it by faith. Now listen, that’s still not a matter of nodding your head and agreeing.

Faith is not merely accepting church doctrine. It means trusting the message is real and meant for us personally. Romans 3:28 says, “We are justified by faith.” We can agree intellectually but until we believe it with our hearts it’s just information. We need to make a decision to trust.

And then, Galatians 3:26 says, we are “children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.” When we not only believe but then trust, there is a change in the relationship. We begin to relate to God as a caring parent, and not as a judge and a prosecutor. 2 Timothy 3:15 says, there is “salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.”

Are you getting this? Faith creates the vital connection with God. It re-establishes a harmony that was destroyed by sin. Now, God’s spirit begins to flow through us once again. But our salvation is not just for our comfort and benefit. Although Paul argues that we are not saved by doing good

deeds, he goes on to say in Ephesians, “For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus *for good works*, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.” (*Eph. 2:10*)

Do you hear that? We are not saved *by* doing good works; rather, we are saved in order *to do* good works. Faith saves us, but not just so we have our ticket to go to Heaven. Faith saves us so that we can be of service to others. Faith saves us from our selfish, sinful self, in order to be useful to God in doing good in the world.

James 2:17 says “Faith without works is dead.” If I say that I’m saved, if I have the head knowledge that Jesus is the Christ, but it doesn’t translate into the way I live my life, it doesn’t really matter what I say I believe. Faith without works is essentially worthless; it’s dead.

Faith is the foundation of the Christian life. Jesus Christ becomes the Rock of our salvation. He is the keystone for everything God wants to create in us, and through us. Faith is trusting in God’s love and forgiveness offered through Jesus Christ.

This is the message of the New Testament. It is the heart of the Christian faith. God’s grace for our salvation and the gift of the Holy Spirit so that we might be able to walk in the newness of life – all of this is given in and through God’s son, Jesus – his life, teachings, death and resurrection. For the Christian, Jesus is the foundation of our faith.

Faith is the vital connection between us and God, mediated through Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit. Now, faith is not merely a set of rose-colored glasses through which we see the world. “Believe in Jesus and everything is wonderful.” No.

The world still has lots of problems in it. And the Christian is not exempt from pain or suffering. God never promised us a rose garden; God

never said if we had faith then life would be easy. In fact, Jesus promised his disciples that if they chose to follow him then they too would face persecution and trials just like he did.

So how do we navigate things like a world pandemic, racial unrest, extremes of wealth and poverty, ongoing war around the world, and the simple personal problems of daily living? 2 Corinthians 5:7 offers us the answer: “We walk by faith and not by sight.”

Yes, the world still has a lot of problems, but we keep our eyes on Jesus. We trust him to show us the way. He didn't say it would be easy, but remember that key word – TRUST. We must trust the Lord even when things look bad, even when things look bleak. Trust in the Lord's goodness and love, even when.....

Hebrews 11:1 says, “Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.” We long for a better world. We have faith in our God to bring it about. We listen for his voice and do what he tells us to do, because he could be that the better world we hope for is to be created by people like you and me, listening and trusting God.

Let me close with the words of an old hymn. It's found in our United Methodist Hymnal on page 467. You may know it well. “When we walk with the Lord, in the light of his word, what a glory he sheds on our way. While we do his good will, he abides with us still, and with all who will trust and obey. Trust and obey, for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus, than to trust and obey.

Faith it is the virtue of trusting. May you be found full of faith. Amen.

This sermon borrows heavily from *The Workbook on Virtues and the Fruit of the Spirit*, by Maxie Dunnam and Kimberly Dunnam Reisman, Nashville: Upper Room Books, 1998, pp. 80-86.