

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
www.lutheranlccf.org
First Sunday After Trinity, June 6, 2021

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 231, 373:5, 293, 541, 264:1.

Lessons: Genesis 15:1-6, Hebrews 11: 1-16, John 8: 23-32.

Sermon Text: Hebrews 11:1.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

(Read both KJV and NIV texts)

(Hebrews 11:1 NIV) ***“Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.”***

(Hebrews 11:1 KJV) ***“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”***

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

“Salvation free By faith in Thee, That is Thy Gospel’s preaching,
The heart and core of Bible lore In all its sacred teaching.
In Christ we must Put all our trust, Not in our deeds or labor;
With conscience pure and heart secure Love Thee, Lord, and our neighbor.”
(The Lutheran Hymnal 266:2)

We are gathered here today to celebrate and talk about salvation. We are joined in worshipping the Lord God who offers salvation to all men. But we must know and understand how we receive salvation. The hymn verse just quoted should make that clear. Salvation is free and it comes by faith in Christ. That is the heart of the Bible’s teachings. We must put all our trust in Jesus Christ, the Son of God and not in ourselves. Faith. Trust. Today we look at answers to the question

WHAT IS FAITH?

- 1. A definition from Scripture.**
- 2. What faith does for us.**

What is this faith we are talking about? God’s Word today tells us it ***“is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.”*** (Hebrews 11:1 KJV) ***“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”*** (NIV)

If you can’t see something, if you can’t hold it in your hand, how do you know that it exists?

When I was a child, I seem to remember that I often heard one of my friends telling about something, perhaps some strange fact, or something strange that would happen if you did this or that, and then someone would say: “prove it”. As adults we may not challenge people so bluntly, but don’t we often in some way ask people to “show me and then I will believe you”? We may use words like “are you sure?” but we want someone to “prove it”. But they don’t always “prove it”. It doesn’t always happen. So some kind of faith is present in very much of our lives.

Faith, God says ***“is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.”*** If you can’t see something and you are hoping for it, how do you know it exists? How did all things come into being? God says one thing and men have a number of different ideas. One of these is man’s theory of evolution. Evolution requires a great deal of faith. It hasn’t been proven, least of all by the steps of the so-called scientific method that we learn even in middle school. Yet many people accept evolution “on faith”. We, however, who believe

that the Bible is God's Word, accept and believe another method for how all things came into being. That is the doctrine of creation.

If you want evidence or proof of something you can't see, what evidence or proof is there? That is what faith means, even for things outside of God's Word. Sometimes people will claim that they can't believe in something they can't see. But aren't there many examples of "faith" all around us? If you do work for someone, they may pay you with pieces of paper with green and black ink on them that have words printed on them that say that they are valid for payment of all debts, public and private. You accept that dollar bill (pull out a dollar bill) on faith! There's no gold or silver that you can trade it for. You accept it because you trust – you have faith – that others will accept it in payment for goods or services that YOU want to buy. Another example: Some of you had to cross at least one river bridge to get to church this morning. You trusted – you had faith – that that bridge would hold the weight of your car and all the other cars and trucks driving over it. We have that kind of faith until a bridge comes crashing down. We could come up with many other illustrations of "faith" in our lives.

But we here in church are talking about a very special kind of faith. Saint John wrote in his gospel: ***"And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name."*** (John 20:30-31 KJV)

We are talking about faith which is being sure of eternal life in heaven, which we cannot see. We are talking about faith in Jesus Christ as our Savior from every one of our sins. Now sin is something which we don't have to take on faith. We can see and experience sin and see and feel the results of sin in our lives. Not just the sin of others, but our own sins. We confess that we are naturally sinful and filthy in God's sight. We must admit when we look at God's laws – his commandments – that we are sinners and that we have not kept the least of God's laws. It is like looking in a mirror and not liking what we see. Not one of us dares to imagine that we do not sin. Anyone who does not teach sin to his or her children is doing them a tremendous disservice. For if we do not see and feel our sins, we will feel no need of a Savior from sin. And the Gospel – the good news of Jesus Christ – teaches us that God loved you – and everyone – so much that he sent his only son to be killed on the cross so that you are saved from your sins. You are saved from eternal damnation in hell to be given eternal life in heaven. But you can't see heaven, can you! Of course not. And that is where faith comes in. You believe God. You have faith that he keeps his promises. Faith is the certainty of what you cannot see. We speak of God's undeserved love and goodness toward us as his grace. And faith is, in a sense, the vehicle by which God delivers his grace to us, as Saint Paul writes in Ephesians: ***"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God--not by works, so that no one can boast."*** (Ephesians 2:8-9 NIV)

Edward Koehler in his Summary of Christian Doctrine writes: "Things we hope for are the kinds of things we desire for ourselves, but we do not yet have them, as for instance, the future reward of eternal salvation. Now faith is ***"the substance"*** of these things; that means we are as sure of them as though even now we actually and substantially had them. Faith is sure and firm confidence in things hoped for, the confidence underlying these things as certainly being expected and awaited by us. The ***"things not seen"*** are the things God in His Word and in the means of grace reveals, but which cannot be seen, such as: His grace, the forgiveness of sins, and all the reality, greatness, and blessedness of God's promises to Christians for time and for eternity. While we do not see them, we do not in the least doubt them, but are as certain of them as though we saw them. Faith is the assurance and confidence of the heart in those invisible and spiritual things promised to us by God in His Word and Gospel. The believer not only knows the promises of his God, but there is in his heart an emotional response; they affect him; he wants them, lays hold of them, and applies them to his personal need."

Such faith is the means or vehicle by which God assures us that he declares us "not guilty" of our sins. ***"For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law."*** (Romans 3:28 NIV)

How valuable is faith? Peter speaks of all kinds of trials that Christians have to suffer, and he writes: ***"These [trials] have come so that your faith--of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire--may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed."*** (1

Peter 1:7 NIV) Everyone in whom the Holy Ghost has worked faith, everyone to whom God the Holy Spirit has given faith has this assurance in John's first letter: ***"for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith."*** (1 John 5:4 NIV) This faith comes from hearing the Word of God, as we read in Romans: ***"Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ."*** (Romans 10:17 NIV)

God's Word, which we believe to be true, and in which we have faith, tells us ***"For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: 'The righteous will live by faith.'"*** (Romans 1:17 NIV)

We have many illustrations of faith in the scriptures. In our Old Testament lesson we heard about one man who is named in Romans as one who believed: ***"What does the Scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.' Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness. David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works: 'Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him.'"*** (Romans 4:3-8 NIV)

Faith gives us the assurance of eternal life. But there is more. Saint Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome: ***"I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong--that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith."*** (Romans 4:3-8 NIV) To mutually be encouraged by each other's faith we must get together and exercise that faith. That is done by exactly what we are doing now. In the previous chapter of the letter to the Hebrew Christians we read: ***"since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching."*** (Hebrews 10:21-25 NIV)

Paul wanted to give more of the Word of God to the Christians in Thessalonica. But notice what his goal is: ***"Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith."*** (1 Thessalonians 3:10 NIV) He wanted to provide something that was lacking in their faith! Is our faith growing daily? It was not just Paul visiting them, it was Paul visiting them so that they could hear the Word of God! And listen to what he wrote in his second letter to them: ***"We ought always to thank God for you, brothers, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love every one of you has for each other is increasing."*** (2 Thessalonians 1:3 NIV) The Word of God must have done its work in them, including the strong words of admonition he gave them in his first letter that he would write such encouraging things to them!

Paul also wrote Timothy a warning about what is really God's work: ***"As I urged you when I went into Macedonia, stay there in Ephesus so that you may command certain men not to teach false doctrines any longer nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies. These promote controversies rather than God's work--which is by faith. The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith."*** (1 Timothy 1:3-5 NIV)

Faith is what God has given us through his Word to lead us into eternal life. Faith gives us the assurance that what God promises will be given to us. As a conclusion, please listen carefully to words from Peter's first letter: ***"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade--kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time."*** (1 Peter 1:3-5 NIV) Amen.