

Trinity (Confirmation) Sunday
May 22, 2016
John 3:1-15
What is Faith
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"I have a good faith." "I just don't know what I'd do without my faith." "My faith gets me by." That candidate is supported by "people of faith." What is faith? The word is used all the time, but have you thought of what it means? If you understand language you know that one word can have an array of different meanings. Today I want to teach you about uses for the word faith, both of which are very important.

The first is faith, which is believed. Every Sunday after the Gospel reading we confess our *faith* in the words of the Nicene Creed. Today we confessed our *faith* in the words of the Athanasian Creed. It began, "Whoever desires to be saved must, above all, hold the catholic *faith*. (Catholic doesn't refer to the Roman Catholic Church, but rather to the Universal or General Church, which has confessed the same faith from the time of the apostles). The faith, which is believed is a confession. It tells you what you believe. The confirmands just spent the past few months and years learning the Christian faith from the Bible and Luther's Small Catechism.

The second use is the faith, which believes. This is probably what people are referring to when they say they have faith. "I have faith" means "I believe in something." This, of course, doesn't simply mean to believe. It is not saving faith to simply believe in an historical fact. You must trust in it. I believe that George Washington was the first president of the United States. I believe that Jesus suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried, and on the third day rose from the dead. Now, besides giving me an edge in Trivia Pursuit, that bit of knowledge won't do me a bit of good unless I also believe that Jesus' suffering, dying, and rising were done *for me*. I must trust in this faith. I must have *faith* in this *faith*. So faith, which believes is not simply the act of knowing, it is trusting, hoping, putting confidence in one's eternal salvation. The author to the Hebrews writes, "Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." (11:1)

Now, faith, which believes is very important. Because it is through this faith that one is saved. Zach's confirmation verse is Ephesians 2:8-9 states, "For by grace have you been saved, through *faith*. And this is not your own doing; it is a gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast." Yet, faith, which believes does you no good if the faith, which you believe is false. Here, I'll tell you a story to help explain.

There was a man who needed to cross a lake in the middle of winter. Ice covered the surface of the lake, but the man worried that the ice was too thin to carry his weight. However, the man had to get across the lake, so he decided to risk it. He cautiously crawled across the ice, spreading his body so to distribute his weight and not break the ice. Suddenly a great big pick-up truck drove by on top of the lake. The ice was over two feet thick, thick enough to support a truck weighing more than two tons and certainly the weight of a man. Another man on another lake had a similar problem. He needed to cross a frozen lake. However, unlike the first man, he had total confidence that the ice could support his weight. He began to strut out across the lake when the ice broke from beneath him. Despite the man's confidence that the ice would hold him, it wouldn't. It was too thin.

This story is meant to show you that having faith, which believes can only do you good if the faith, which you believe is correct. In other words, trusting with all your heart only does you good if what you trust in is true.

What is our faith, which we believe? It is the confession taught from the Holy Bible, which reveals our God and Savior. Our faith teaches that there is one God. The Father is God. The Son is God. The Holy Spirit is God. Yet, there are not three gods, but one God. The Father is not the Son or the Holy Spirit. The Son is not the Father or the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is not the Father or the Son. They are three distinct persons. Yet, these three persons are *one* God. The Son is begotten of the Father from eternity. Yet, there was never a time when the Son did not exist. The Father and the Son are both eternal. The Holy Spirit is not begotten, but he proceeds from the Father and the Son. Yet there was never a time when the Holy Spirit did not exist. These three persons are equal in glory and majesty. They are eternal, none is before or after

another. They are infinite and uncreated. Yet, there are not three eternal or infinites or uncreated, but one God. One substance.

We believe this impossibility, because the Bible clearly teaches that there is only one God. "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one!" (Deut. 6:4) Yet, we know that the Father is God. The Son is God. And the Holy Spirit is God. The Father did not become man and die on the cross, neither did the Holy Spirit. Rather the Father sent his Son to become man, be born of the Virgin Mary, suffer and die. And the Father and the Son send the Holy Spirit to give us new birth, create faith in our hearts, and forgive our sins through Jesus' blood.

This is the faith, which we believe. We confess it to be true, because the Bible clearly teaches this. It is important that we believe and trust in *this* faith and not in another. The Muslim god Allah did not send his son to die for you. The god of Judaism does not declare you righteous through faith in Christ. The false gods of the Jehovah Witnesses and Mormons do not save you by grace, but demand good works to earn your salvation. A person can have strong faith in one of these false religions, but that would not save him. Only faith in the true God saves.

Faith alone saves, yet it is important to have faith in the right faith. This is the danger many face in our society. I have faith. That means that I don't need to hear God's Word. I don't need to pray. I don't need to go to church or receive the Sacrament, because I have faith and faith alone saves. But what *is* faith? Faith, which believes isn't simply knowledge. When Jesus comes with trumpet sounds, he won't simply give you a multiple choice quiz and if you pass with 70% you go to heaven. Faith, which believes is faith which trusts. It is faith, which hears, holds on tight, and feeds.

Faith alone saves, but which faith do you believe? Do you believe in the Triune God, who is revealed in Scripture? Do you believe in the Jesus attested by the Apostles, true God and man, who gave himself up for us on the cross, who gives himself to us in Baptism and the Lord's Supper? Or is your Jesus an imaginary friend, made up in your own image?

You see the first commandment isn't just broken if you bow down to a golden calf or sacrifice a goat to Baal. Satan works diligently to create a faith for you to trust in that is completely false. He'll even

manufacture the faith, custom made for you. You don't find anything wrong with sin? Here's a Jesus who's fine with it too. Don't trust organized religion? Here's a Jesus who's super cas. Don't want to listen to preaching or eat bread and wine? Here's a Jesus who will come to you on your terms, in your dreams, imagination, and leisure. The problem with these Jesuses, is they aren't the true Jesus. They aren't the true God. They are false faiths. They are like thin ice on a lake. No matter how confident you are in them, no matter how strong your faith is in them, they won't hold you up when it counts.

You four confirmands will be asked, "Do you intend to continue steadfast in this confession and Church and to suffer all, even death, rather than fall away from it?" This question asks if you will continue to confess the faith you were taught in catechism class. It is asking if you will continue to confess the Holy Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, three persons, yet one God. It asks if you will continue to confess Jesus Christ, true God and true man, who suffered for your sins and rose from the dead. It asks if you will continue to believe and trust in the preached Word and the Sacraments, in your Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

It is important that you have faith in *this* faith, because it is this faith that will actually give you eternal life. You have faith in Jesus. Where does Jesus promise to be? In his Word and Sacraments. God's Word of forgiveness guarantees you eternal life, something nothing else can do. The Lord's Supper is Christ's true body and blood. It truly does strengthen your faith and forgive your sins. It truly does give you Jesus, the real Jesus, in whom you believe.

Jesus says something that seems contradictory in our text. First he says, "Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God." Then he says, "So must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life." So which is it? Be born again or believe? Here is the lesson Jesus is teaching. That which is born of flesh is flesh. That which is born of spirit is spirit. You children were born naturally of the flesh. The flesh cannot believe in Jesus. The flesh cannot have faith in the true faith. It is impossible. Only the spirit can believe in the true faith. So you must be born again of the Spirit. This happened in your Baptism, when God poured his Holy Spirit on you. When God added his

Word to water, he made Baptism a washing of new birth in the Holy Spirit. And with God's Word he continues to give his Holy Spirit, who creates and sustains faith.

For you young confirmands to continue in this one true faith, which alone saves, you need the Holy Spirit. That means you need the Word of God. You've finished confirmation class, but you haven't finished learning. Even Nicodemus, a teacher of Israel, had a lot to learn. And the Holy Spirit isn't done teaching you. And every time you hear the true word of God preached to you, declaring you the truth that Jesus has won for you eternal salvation, there is the Holy Spirit increasing your faith in the true faith. Where you receive Jesus' true body and blood in the Lord's Supper, there the Holy Spirit too increases faith. The Holy Spirit cannot be separated from Jesus and his Word. With Jesus and his Word is the Holy Spirit and there is true faith. As that great Lutheran hymn states,

I know my faith is founded

On Jesus Christ, my God and Lord;

And this my faith confessing,

Unmoved I stand on His Sure Word.

Our reason cannot fathom

The truth of God profound;

Who trusts in human wisdom

Relies on shifting ground.

God's Word is all sufficient,

It makes divinely sure;

And trusting in its wisdom,

My faith shall rest secure.

May your faith be grounded in Christ until he calls you home.

Amen.

