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Epiphany Lutheran Church, Castle Rock, Colorado  
Proper 14 (Pentecost 9), Series C  
Saturday, August 10<sup>th</sup>, 2019  
Sunday, August 11<sup>th</sup>, 2019

**Sermon: Holy Habits: Trust**

**Text: Genesis 15:1-6; Hebrews 11:1-16; Luke 12:22-34**

Focus: God gives us saving faith and faith to obey.

Function: That they would live by faith.

Structure: Text-Application

Locus: “That I may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom...” (SC, Second Article of Apostles’ Creed).

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Savior, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (Heb. 11:1, ESV).<sup>1</sup> Today is the final week in our sermon series on spiritual disciplines, titled “Holy Habits.” Today we turn to trust. Some people use the words trust and faith interchangeably. Even dictionary.com defines *faith* as “confidence or trust in a person or thing.”<sup>2</sup> (Incidentally, betraying the naturalistic bias of even linguists today, the secondary definition of *faith* is supposedly “belief that is not based on proof”). Yet, as we discover today, the proof of our belief is the fact that, in the past, God kept his promises to the Old Testament saints, empowering us to believe that he will keep his promises to us. As I stated in Bible class last week: faith is looking forward, from the present, to the future fulfillment of God’s past promises.

Believing God’s promises is what gives us the righteousness that comes by faith, also known as “saving faith.” The Bible declares that we are “justified by faith apart from works of the law” (Rom. 3:28). God declares—and makes—us righteous, or innocent of our sins, when he

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<sup>1</sup> All Scripture references, unless otherwise indicated, are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/faith>

justifies us. This happens when we believe the promises in his saving Word. A wonderful example is Abraham (or Abram) in our Old Testament lesson today: “And he believed the LORD, and He counted it to him as righteousness” (Gen. 15:6).

But there is another kind of faith that is related but different than saving faith. This kind of faith acts on the promises of God and responds with obedient action. This is the kind of faith I’m talking about when we discuss the holy habit of trust, the kind of faith that trusts God no matter what—no matter your circumstances, trials, temptations, triumphs, or setbacks. Our Old Testament heroes and heroines of the faith were commended for this confidence and trust (Heb. 11:2). Because they believed God’s promises, they obeyed his call and command. “*By faith* Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain.... *By faith* Noah... constructed the ark.... *By faith* Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place..., not knowing where he was going” (Heb. 11:4, 7, 8). *By faith... by faith... BY FAITH!* This phrase occurs so many times in Hebrews 11 that some preachers have come to call it “the Hall of Faith.”

This faith empowered the various inductees in the Hall of Faith—patriarchs, judges, and prophets—to do amazing things for God and his people. Sarah conceived a child in her old age. Moses rescued the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. David drove out the Philistines and established the kingdom. Daniel silenced lions. Dead people were raised back to life. Numerous nameless heroes and heroines endured persecution and suffering for the sake of God’s kingdom. And all of it was done *by faith*.

Hebrews 11 is an inspiring passage of Scripture. Here we encounter heroes much more inspiring than movie stars, pop princesses, and professional athletes. Noah, Abraham and Sarah, Moses, and Rahab—these are people worth emulating and following their example.

There's only one problem: I don't have the same kind of faith they had. Jesus says that if I just had as much faith as a tiny mustard seed, I could tell a mulberry tree or a mountain to be removed and cast into the sea (Matt. 17:20; Luke 17:6). But I haven't moved a lot of mountains lately. (I think the Civilian Conservation Corps and the Army Corps of Engineers are the only ones who have!). In 1 Corinthians 12, faith is listed among the so-called "spiritual" gifts (better called "gifts of grace").<sup>3</sup> The Spirit apportions different gifts to different people as he chooses (1 Cor. 12:11). Maybe great faith just isn't my gift. Maybe I will never do anything "big" for God. Do *you* ever feel that way, or am I the only one?

Sometimes the biggest leap of faith is just to take a step out your door in the direction God guides you. Big oaks grow from tiny acorns. Big things come from small beginnings. Or, as J.R.R. Tolkien writes in *The Lord of the Rings*: "It's a dangerous business... going out your door. You step on the road, and if you don't keep your feet, there's no knowing where you might be swept off to."

Abraham and Sarah did not know where they would be swept off to when God called them to leave their home, their relatives, and their household idols.<sup>4</sup> They didn't have Google Maps or a GPS. They didn't have an address for their destination or even a name! "Go," Yahweh said. "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you" (Gen. 12:1). And so they went. "*By faith* [they] went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents..." (Heb. 11:9). God used Abraham's faith to

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<sup>3</sup> The Greek word for "spiritual" is *pneumatikos*, whereas the word for "grace-gift" is *charisma* (plural: *charismata*). The word used in 1 Corinthians 12 is *charismata*. In fact, the *only* place in the NT where the phrase "spiritual gifts" actually occurs in Greek is Romans 1:11.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Josh. 24:2, which indicates that Abraham and his father Terah likely worshiped other gods prior to Yahweh's call in Genesis 12.

accomplish the impossible and—ultimately—to father the messianic line that would lead to the birth of Jesus Christ. But that amazing faith began with just one step in the right direction.

I may never have faith to move mountains, but that doesn't mean that I'm hopeless or useless to God. He can still use me. He can still use you. And he does. Every time we pray for someone or visit the sick or read the Bible to our children or give money or goods to help the poor and needy, we are acting *by faith*. We trust that God will take our small, simple acts, which, in isolation, may seem entirely insignificant. But he rolls them all together, and in the aggregate, he transforms them into mighty feats of faith.

Maybe our trust begins by just worrying a little less. Jesus says not to worry about what you will eat or what you will drink or what you will wear, because your heavenly Father knows that you need these things and generously provides for you (Luke 12:22, 30). “And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?” Jesus asks (v. 25). (In fact, medical science proves that stress and worry actually *shorten* your life rather than prolong it!). My dad used to say that worry means you're praying to the wrong god. If you're worried and anxious all the time (as I tend to be), you're probably focused on the wrong things—those idols we talked about last week, like money or success or power. Remember: the heart is an idol factory, and Satan uses them to draw our hearts away from Jesus.

But we have a loving, heavenly Father who loves to give his children gifts (Jas. 1:17). Jesus encourages you to “seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you” (Luke 12:31). The will of God will never take you where the grace of God cannot keep you. Let me repeat that: the *will* of God will never take you where the *grace* of God cannot keep you.

God loves you and cares for you. He gave his Son Jesus to die for you so that if you believe in him, you will not perish, but have eternal life (John 3:16). If God did not spare his

own Son, but gave him up for you, don't you think he will take care of the rest and "graciously give us all things" (Rom. 8:32)? Through the preaching of the Gospel and the washing of water and the Word, God gave you faith in his Son. He will also give you faith to follow wherever he leads.

Recently, a wonderful example of faith played out right before us. When our congregation applied for a Director of Christian Education (DCE) intern last autumn, we had no idea whether or not we would receive one. As Professor Duport told us, there are always more applicants for interns than interns available. Plus, even if we were to receive an intern, we would have no idea what he or she would be like before they came. Would they be a good student? A people person? Or a total flake?! We wouldn't be able to indicate our preference for one candidate over another or even interview them. It all might have seemed like a crapshoot, but we entrusted it to God's hands, and he provided us with Kristin. We acted in faith, and God blessed us.

Now consider the faith required by Kristin to apply for an internship that could send her to God-knows-where for at least a year (maybe more) of her life. Internship assignments are not unlike vicarage assignments. Toward the end of my second year of seminary, when my classmates and I were preparing to receive our vicarage assignments, we joked that the Council of Presidents and the Placement Director just wrote our names on a bunch of darts, blindfolded themselves, and then threw our names at a map of the United States. Wherever the dart landed is where we'd go! Fortunately, the call process is not quite so random as that, although sometimes it can be hard to tell.

As it turns out, Kristin, our DCE intern, grew up in Southern California and lived the past ten years in Georgia. She has family and friends in both of those places. She's starting over

here. She has no concept of winter or know how to drive in the snow. Colorado is kind of a culture shock. But Kristin agreed to come here—sight unseen—in the full confidence that God knows what he’s doing, even if *she* doesn’t! She trusted God. She had faith to follow. And so she did. *By faith* Kristin went out to land she did not know, although, unlike Abraham, she gets to live in an apartment instead of a tent.

The Bible says, “We walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Cor. 5:7). All of us are strangers and exiles here on earth (Heb. 11:13). None of us belong. As Christians, we have no lasting city here on earth. But we desire a “better country, that is, a heavenly one” (Heb. 11:16). Some Day Christ will return, and our faith will turn to sight. We will see Jesus as he is and be like him (1 John 3:2). But until that day, we live *by faith*. We look only to Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, the one who went to the greatest lengths—even to hell and back again—in order to make us his own (cf. Heb. 12:2). A God like he will not make you flounder. Follow me, Jesus says, *by faith*. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of ✠ the Holy Spirit. Amen.