

# "Faith: The Humble, Blind Pauper"

Text: Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16

May the love of God the Father fill you with wonder; may the sacrifice of God the Son fill you with gratitude; and may the indwelling of God the Holy Spirit fill you with faith, hope, and confidence. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians:

An old man walks outside and sits down, looking up at the stars. He is old, a bit frustrated, and dejected. He has everything and, in his mind, he has nothing. The bulk of his life has come and gone, and although he has been blessed with great wealth, he and his wife were never able to have children. All of the wealth that they have accumulated will pass not to their own son but to one who is not their offspring.

Yet he looks up to the stars on this night not out of idle curiosity or wonder, but because he was told to do so. By God himself. And then God himself tells him an amazing thing: He would not only have a direct descendant, his descendants would be as uncountable as the stars. And the old man, Abraham, *believed what he was told*.

This is faith, but to understand what was happening there we need to wrap our minds around several unique facts. First, up until that point in time there is no record of anyone having a baby once they were so far beyond the child-bearing years. It never happened. Ever. Yet God said it would. Think on that for a moment. You and I accept this account as fact, in part because we have heard the story from little on. God's Word tells us it is so. To us then the story is not so unusual because you and I know that it has already been done. Not so with Abraham. Such a thing *had never before happened*. What God was telling him was therefore *unheard of*. Second, Abraham's relationship with the One, True God – the LORD – was relatively young. God had sought him out not many years earlier, which means that, unlike most here today, Abraham had no lifelong history to give evidence that the Triune God could be trusted. He found himself in relatively new and uncharted waters. Third, Abraham, for all his wealth, was a stranger in a foreign land, living in a tent. All around him were the possessors of the land, with their kings and armies, and those kings and armies routinely fought to the death to retain possession of the very land God had promised simply to give to Abraham and to all of those descendants.

And yet despite all of this, and with no evidence of any kind to corroborate what he was being told - but with a whole world of evidence to the contrary - the old man believed what the Lord God was telling him. *That* is faith.

Our text for this morning refers back to this event, and thereby teaches us a great deal about true faith itself – what it is and what it is not. Here we will learn that faith, *true saving* faith, is a humble, blind pauper. Our text is found in the Book of Hebrews, the 11<sup>th</sup> Chapter:

<sup>ESV</sup> **Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16** *Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. <sup>2</sup> For by it the people of old received their commendation. <sup>3</sup> By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible... <sup>8</sup> ¶ By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. <sup>9</sup> By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. <sup>10</sup> For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God. <sup>11</sup> By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised. <sup>12</sup> Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore. <sup>13</sup> ¶ These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. <sup>14</sup> For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. <sup>15</sup> If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. <sup>16</sup> But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.*

These are God's Words. In great awe and humility we acknowledge this fact and seek to sit attentively at the feet of these words and to both learn the lessons and gain the benefits that our God intends for us to hereby possess. To this end we pray: **"Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth."** Amen.

There are those who help, and there are those who are helped. You are Christians, so I assume you would rather be the ones giving the help than the ones receiving it from others. Yet as is the case in almost

all areas of life, there is good and bad here. It is obviously good to prefer pulling the wagon to riding while others pull your weight (not to mention how necessary such an attitude is for the survival of any society.) A good work ethic is obviously God-pleasing, for God himself tells us as much in his Word. The bad here, however, is when that sort of good outlook or attitude is born of pride, rather than the Holy Spirit working through the new man in the Christian heart. As sinful human beings, we naturally tend to think of ourselves as superior, which means we generally find it rather difficult to admit when we have a need that someone else must supply. Those who have been in both positions (benefactor and recipient) know firsthand how much better it feels to be the giver rather than the receiver.

Obviously this natural feeling of superiority is bad enough, but there is something even more sinister at work here – even more evil and diabolical. Our natural desire to be the donor rather than the recipient constantly wars against the character and nature of the gospel and saving faith. There we are always the indigent, the beggar, the pauper - always the recipient, always the ones in desperate need.

This brings us to our first lesson about faith, which is that God-pleasing faith is, and must ever be, profoundly humble.

Think back to Abraham as he sat alone outside his tent – an old man frustrated at the fact that he had no heir. How utterly humbling to be told by God to look up at the stars and to hear the divine promise that his descendants would be equally uncountable. Humbling, because Abraham had to know that there was no way he could do this on his own. His human effort had failed. He and Sarah had no strength or ability, humanly speaking, to create the human life that they craved. They found themselves therefore in a most revealing and humbling place. If they were to have an heir, that child would have to be miraculously provided for them.

Abject humility is therefore the first characteristic of the Christian faith we need to acknowledge this morning, and for some of us perhaps the only way we can learn such a lesson is to suffer great need or helplessness. When we are always the providers rather than the recipients, always the helpers rather than the ones being helped or who need help, how difficult to bow our heads before our God and acknowledge our utter inability and our profound deficiency. How difficult to truly acknowledge that we have no power to supply what we so desperately need.

True Christian faith is first of all therefore humble. It is also both blind and indigent.

Obviously faith always believes *something*. That is, faith has an object, something that it believes to be true or reliable. Our text however explains that *true* faith believes whatever it believes not on the basis of what can be seen or proved, but on the very opposite – that which can in no way be verified. Faith involves believing that which could never stand up in a modern court of law. Faith believes something for which there is no observable, irrefutable, empirical evidence. Our text used those words that are so familiar to many of you to describe the true nature or character of the thing: ***"Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."*** Think back to Abraham alone looking up at the stars. Absolutely nothing on earth supported God's promise. There was no logical, rational, scientific reason for Abraham to believe what God was telling him. He believed it anyway. Faith is blind.

You have things like that in your life. If you haven't yet, you will. You have had or will have problems that are insurmountable – situations for which there is simply no solution. Recall Jairus, who came to Jesus because his daughter was at the point the point of death from sickness. While Jesus was still on the way to see the girl, word came that she had died. Talk about an insurmountable problem. Jesus words to Jairus are the very same words he would speak to us this morning: ***"Do not fear; only believe."*** Faith is therefore blind in that it trusts God's Word even in the absence of any visible evidence.

Faith therefore is humble, acknowledging the inability to provide what is needed, and it is blind, believing something to be true in the absence of any human proof. It is also a pauper or indigent, for true faith always acknowledges a profound, monstrous need that God alone can supply. Like a beggar, therefore, true faith always has its hand out, asking to receive.

This is one of the ways in which the world's blind faith is different than Christian faith. The world *has* blind faith, but of a much different sort. The third verse of our text reminds us that we believe in creation blindly, because God says it is so in his Word. The world believes blindly in evolution. What is the difference? The world's blind faith trusts in man, in self, in the impossible notion that we somehow created ourselves. The Christian's blind faith looks to God and there places its trust. So too the object of Abraham and Sarah's faith was the word and promise of their God, not their own power or ability. In our Old Testament lesson we read: ***"And he (Abram) believed the LORD, and he (the Lord) counted it to him as righteousness."***

(Genesis 15:6) God was teaching Abraham and Sarah – and *us* – that it is not the strength of the individual or of the individual's faith that is important, it is the object that is believed. Faith that trusts always and only in the Word and Promise of the One True God is never disappointed, never fails, never knows change or modification, is never in doubt – *because that Word and promise of God never changes.*

You can see then how important it is to know not only that faith is humble and blind, but that faith is the indigent that always acknowledges a need that must be supplied by God. In our relationship with our God, we are always the beggars. We are always the ones who come, hat in hand, in dire need of that which we ourselves cannot hope to provide. We are the ones who are **"poor in spirit,"** who **"hunger and thirst after righteousness."** We are the ones who are continually characterized by a **"contrite and broken spirit,"** and who come daily begging our God **"take not thy Holy Spirit from me, but restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation."** Christian faith therefore always involves receiving. We are the ones who come to our God as miserable, starving creatures, rightly singing, *"Just as I am without one plea..."*

The sinful pride of mankind seeks always to turn this true and right understanding of faith on its ear. In the minds of many, faith has already been perverted by Satan into a work that man does, as though faith is the element that man provides and on that basis he is saved. Faith is actually a description of the receptive quality in the human heart. In and of itself "faith" has no merit. It is what is received by faith that saves us. Faith is the open savings account into which God places all of the funds. It is the empty, outstretched, beseeching hands of a beggar, created there by God the Holy Spirit alone, whose needs are then satisfied by God himself.

The best news of all, as far as you and I are concerned, is that into our outstretched, begging hands of faith God has placed the forgiveness for every single one of our sins. Not so with those who believe that they need nothing. To all such God gives nothing. To imagine that you yourself provide anything for your own salvation is to deny Christ and to exclude yourself from the payment he made for your sin upon Calvary's cross. It is to "opt out" of that divine settlement.

How foolish then to think of God's declaration of innocence (his justification) as anything other than a gift that we have received through humble, blind faith. When God looked at us from the holy, eternal perspective of heaven, he saw us exactly what was there – unworthy sinners all. Yet on the basis of the goodness of his Son, God has credited his Son's perfection as the payment in full for our sins – and in so doing he

has also promised us a kingdom, a city, an existence that (like the patriarchs of old) will not be realized until after this life has ended.

This is great news for you and me, and for every sinner on earth. We are indeed needy, but our great needs – *all* of them – have been supplied by our God. Humbly acknowledge this fact and fall gratefully upon your knees before your God as the beggar that you truly are. But then also thrill to the fact that the object of your faith is God's own promise that he has forgiven your sins, freely and forever, and that as your Heavenly Father he will continue to supply all that you need to remain and grow in that one true faith.

Thanks be to God for the gift of such a faith, and for the heaven he has prepared for us. Amen.

### Scripture Readings

<sup>ESV</sup> **Genesis 15:1-6** After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: "Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great." <sup>2</sup> But Abram said, "O Lord GOD, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" <sup>3</sup> And Abram said, "Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir." <sup>4</sup> And behold, the word of the LORD came to him: "This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir." <sup>5</sup> And he brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be." <sup>6</sup> And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness.

<sup>ESV</sup> **Luke 12:32-40** "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. <sup>33</sup> Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. <sup>34</sup> For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. <sup>35</sup> ¶ "Stay dressed for action and keep your lamps burning, <sup>36</sup> and be like men who are waiting for their master to come home from the wedding feast, so that they may open the door to him at once when he comes and knocks. <sup>37</sup> Blessed are those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes. Truly, I say to you, he will dress himself for service and have them recline at table, and he will come and serve them. <sup>38</sup> If he comes in the second watch, or in the third, and finds them awake, blessed are those servants! <sup>39</sup> But know this, that if the master of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have left his house to be broken into. <sup>40</sup> You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect."

# ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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Today's Organist: Suzannah Miller

The 12<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost – August 7, 2016

## The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

## The Opening Hymn – 398 (Red Hymnal)

"Renew Me, O Eternal Light"

## The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

## The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

**The Old Testament Lesson:** (Genesis 15:1-6) Our Old Testament Lesson helps to form the basis of our Sermon text for this morning. It speaks to us of Abraham (then still called "Abram") and how he was honored by God himself. Yet we hear and regard these words wrongly if we imagine that Abraham earned God's favor because of something that he did, or because of something that he provided. Such a thing is not possible when we recognize that everything good that we have, even faith itself, is a gift from our God.

## Psalm of the Day: Psalm 146 (Brown Hymnal page 41)

**The New Testament Lesson:** (Luke 12:32-40) Abraham obeyed God's command, even when it meant leaving his home and family and wandering in a strange land – living in a tent for the rest of his life. So also we too are supposed to recognize God's call to live in this world as those who are not owners, but strangers passing through. In our second reading Jesus' disciples were taught the lesson of total reliance on God for all of their earthly needs. God will always take care of his children.

## The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed – page 15. (Brown Hymnal)

## The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 396 (Red Hymnal)

"Oh, for a Faith That Will Not Shrink"

## The Sermon – Text: Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16 (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

**"Faith: The Humble, Blind Pauper"**

## The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

## The Post-Sermon Hymn -371 (Verses 1-4) (Red Hymnal)

"Jesus, Thy Blood and Righteousness"

## The Offering followed by the Prayers (Song by VBS children)

## The Benediction

## The Closing Hymn – 377 (Verses 1, 6-7) (Red Hymnal)

"Salvation unto Us has Come"

## Silent Prayer

**Welcome!** - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with churches and missions throughout the United States, as well as Canada, India, and Africa. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again!

## Attendance - Sunday (48) Ave (46)

### This Week at St. Paul:

<b>Today</b>	<b>-10:00 a.m.</b>	– Sunday Worship Service
	<b>-11:00 a.m.</b>	– Fellowship/Coffee Time
<b>Next Sunday</b>	<b>-10:00 a.m.</b>	– Sunday Worship w/ Holy Communion
	<b>-11:15 a.m.</b>	– Fellowship/Coffee Time

**CLC News** – Pastor Ed Starkey has returned the call to Rock of Ages of Grand Rapids, MI. Carly Meyer has returned the call to St. Stephen of Mountain View, CA. That congregation has now called Becky McKenney of Fort Atkinson, WI. Pastor Luke Bernthal is considering the call to Faith of Markesan, WI. Pastor Del Maas is considering the call to Mt. Zion of Detroit. Professor-elect Paul Naumann is scheduled to be installed at the opening service of Immanuel Lutheran High School, College, and Seminary in Eau Claire, WI on August 22.

**Looking Ahead** – Our custom is to return to our regular (non-summer) schedule after Labor Day, which this year falls on September 5. Confirmation Class and Midweek Bible Study are therefore scheduled to resume on September 7, and Sunday School and Sunday Bible Class on September 11.

**Sunday School Teachers** – We are again looking for volunteers to teach in our Sunday School for the 2016-2017 school year. This is vital kingdom work as the future of the Church is directly impacted by the instruction of our youth. Please prayerfully consider if you could serve in this way, and speak to the Pastor if you are able to so serve.

**Thank You** – Thanks to those members who gave of their time and talents in the Lord's service at this summer's Vacation Bible School. Eleven students participated, learning about types or pictures of Christ in the Old Testament.