

Trinity Lutheran Church, Gillette, WY
August 19, 2007

Faith and Pain

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, amen. The text for the sermon this morning comes from the Epistle, which was read earlier.

Faith. It's a broad topic with many definitions to the word. One can walk into any Christian bookstore and find a broad range of books on the topic. We talk a lot about faith, but what is true faith and where is true faith found?

A simple explanation of faith is "the active principle by which the individual enters into that right relation to God which the all-atoning work of Christ has established for the entire world." Another definition of "faith is also conceived as a state. In this respect faith is reviewed as the continued possession of the gifts and blessings of God, in and through Christ, through an enduring, abiding confidence in His all-complete and all-sufficient redemption."

When one hears those definitions, one might see a problem with them. Nowhere does it talk about us and what it is that we do. Nowhere does it talk about putting trust in the things of this world. How can you have faith when you don't have us involved with it?

That's where the rubber meets the road. Faith is something which is given to us, not something which we make or create. Paul makes that clear in his letter to the Romans: "*So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.*" Faith is something which comes from the outside, not from the inside. There isn't anything that we can do to have faith; it must be given to us. Faith is given to us by the Holy

Spirit. It comes to us in the Word of God. It comes to us in Holy Baptism. It comes to us in the Lord's Supper. It comes to us through Christ, who died for our sins. Only through these means does true faith come.

What is the true faith? The writer to the Hebrews tells us at the beginning of chapter 11: "*Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.*" All throughout our text for today, we read about those people who lived throughout biblical times and the faith which they had, "*the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.*"

Each and every person whom the author of Hebrews mentions was a person of great faith. You have Abraham, Moses, the prophets and patriarchs. All were great people of faith, yet each of them experienced pain in their lives, all stemming from the faith which they had in God.

Abraham is often called "the father of the faithful." It was promised to Abraham that it would be his descendants who would inherit the kingdom of God. However, even the father of the faithful had his share of trials and tribulations and pain along the way. His most painful moment came in Genesis 22 where God commanded him to sacrifice his only son, Isaac, to God.

Here God promises to Abraham that his descendants would inherit the kingdom of God, yet God wants him to sacrifice his only son. For us, we would probably scoff at the idea that we have to sacrifice something as valuable as our firstborn. Instead of scoffing at God's request, Abraham took his only son and went to the land of Moriah to offer him as the sacrifice, just as God had told him to do. When Isaac questioned about where they would find the lamb for the sacrifice, Abraham told him, "*God will provide for himself*

the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.” Instead of losing or questioning his faith, he continued strong in his faith, even in the face of what was to happen, that God would provide. In the end, the faith of Abraham did not waiver. Abraham focused on God rather than on the circumstances of the impending sacrifice.

The second example which the author of Hebrews sets before us is Moses. Moses may not come to mind immediately when you think about suffering and pain, yet Moses faced both in his unwavering faith. Moses was a highly cultured person growing up in Pharaoh’s house. His compassion for his people led him out of Pharaoh’s palace and into the desert of Midian where he tended sheep. Moses suffered because he trusted God more than he loved his position and power. He looked forward to what was ahead of him rather than what was behind him.

Moses is probably one of the best examples of faith in the Old Testament because he forsook all for God. How many of us would leave a position of comfort and security to tend to sheep? While Moses tended to sheep, he also tended to another flock of sheep, God’s people. He continued to be their shepherd through all of their needs, in the good times and in the bad. He had faith that one day, God would provide for Moses and all of the flock which God had entrusted to him, a home. Through faith in God, God provided to the Israelites the Promised Land.

The third example of our text is the prophets and patriarchs. Who would want to be like any of these people? Who would voluntarily want to be stoned? Sawn in two? Scourged? Imprisoned? Mocked? Wear clothes of goatskins? Live in a cave? Be tortured? These are just some of the things which many people in Scripture did as a testament to the faith which they had in God our Father.

All of the people mentioned above suffered pain in this life, some more than any of us could ever imagine. Through all the pain they suffered, they still held to the faith in God and His Word and promises. However, they “*did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better.*” What could be better than having your descendants be the very inheritors of the kingdom of God? What could be better than entering the Promised Land after forty years of walking around the desert? Jesus is better.

Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, is the greatest of all promises. This promise includes the resurrection and the glorification of our bodies when Christ shall appear in His second coming to those who are expecting Him for salvation. This promise is a promise for you and for me and for all believers in Christ Jesus.

For us sinners, we have been given faith by the Holy Spirit in our Baptism, just as little Kyia was given faith this morning. We who are sinners have been united with God forever as His beloved children through what Christ has done for us, through Baptism and through His life, death and resurrection. We have the fulfillment of God’s promises in Jesus Christ.

We can look back to the cross of Christ to see our pain dealt with once and for all. As we look back, we remember what the prophet Isaiah wrote: “*Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed.*” Our pains are nothing compared to the pain He bore on our behalf.

As we continue our race, there will be pain. How can we endure it? By looking to the cross, to Jesus, who now is seated in heaven at the right hand of God. When we focus on Him, our pain doesn't go away, but our faith is strengthened. Through faith in the things above, we can bear it because we see what Jesus did for us and we see what's coming as well: the second coming of Christ, to end all pain on this world and to take us all to be with Him forever in everlasting righteousness. In the name of Jesus, amen.

Now the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, amen.