

“What is Faith?”

March 11-12, 2006

Romans 4:13-25

Pastor Tom Schoenherr

What is faith? That is our question for this weekend’s worship. We are focusing on the big questions during the Lenten season. What might be some related questions to this central question? We could ask, “What do I believe? Do I have enough faith? Can I get more faith? Where does faith come from?”

Abraham is the subject of faith in the text from Romans. Abraham had a very close relationship with God. Maybe this is part of the answer. Faith is a relationship with God, a trusting relationship. God promised Abraham some things and Abraham received those promises. He believed God and God counted Abraham as righteous as a result of faith.

What did God promise Abraham? God promised that God would be with Abraham and bless him so that Abraham would be a blessing to many people. God promised that Abraham would have descendants as numerous as the sands on the shore, and the stars in the sky. God promised Abraham a land. God gave Abraham all these promises before there was any evidence of any of them, and Abraham believed the promises; he believed that God would come through. Even when there are no signs or any proof, faith holds on to the promises and the God who is behind those promises. Faith is holding on to God.

In the recent bestseller, *1776*, by David McCullough, we are told the story of George Washington and the battles of the Revolutionary War only during that one year, 1776. McCullough ends the book in this way:

The year 1776, celebrated as the birth of the nation and for the signing of the Declaration of Independence, was for those who carried the fight for independence forward a year of all-too-few victories, of sustained suffering, disease, hunger, desertion, cowardice, disillusionment, defeat, terrible discouragement, and fear, as they would never forget, but also of phenomenal courage and bedrock devotion to country, and that, too, they would never forget.

Especially for those who had been with Washington and who knew what a close call it was at the beginning...the outcomes seemed little short of a miracle.

For Washington, there would have been every reason for him to give up and go home. The hardships were overwhelming at times, but he was given a vision and a promise of a nation who was free from the control of the British, and this promise guided him. Abraham was given a promise by God that he would be the father of a great nation and that God would give them land, and they would be a blessing to many other nations. Finally God said that from Abraham’s descendants all the nations of the earth would be blessed. Abraham never saw those promises fulfilled.

What is faith? Faith is receiving, accepting and holding on to a promise that comes from God. Many people put their faith in something that they think will bring them

lasting and real happiness, or help them have lasting joy. These may include money, power, work, alcohol and other drugs, exercise and health, a nutritious diet, helping and serving others, etc. At times these may serve us well, and we are happy with the life we have and the gods we have chosen. Finally, these end up telling us that we can never have enough, do enough or give enough to please God. And our gods leave us feeling empty. Without faith, founded in Jesus Christ, we are left empty, alone, dead.

Faith is a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. It is a relationship of trust in God's promise for us, and that promise is Jesus Christ. Faith is not just what gets you through the night of fear and worry. Faith is not just what helps you feel good or gives you peace. Faith is what holds on to Jesus Christ, and God's love for you. We may be going through more struggle, suffering, loss or pain than we have ever had before. We may be experiencing disease, cancer, loss of loved ones, family heartache, job uncertainty, and in the midst of all this, faith holds on to the promise that God loves us and is delighted with us because of what Jesus Christ has done for us.

Historical faith is based on knowledge. I have knowledge of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. I can repeat the Bible stories, and I know the facts about God. Historical faith is important. Saving faith is holding on to the promise that the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ are for you, for me, for us. Faith trusts, receives, accepts, holds on to the promise that God is delighted with us through Christ.

Faith holds on to the promise that in the midst of disease and the fear of death all around me, and when the world seems to be falling apart in a variety of ways; when the present is scary and the future is totally uncertain, there is light and hope and peace for my life in holding on to Christ. Jesus Christ is holding on to me and you.

Faith holds on to the promise that the bread I receive in my hand and put into my mouth, and the wine or grape juice that I drink is only that, but it is also what Jesus says it is, His true Body and Blood. When I receive Christ I also receive the promise of the forgiveness of sins, everlasting life, and healing that is for eternity.

Faith holds on to the promise that when sin is weighing heavily on us, Christ has taken our sin. We stand before God forgiven and righteous, through faith in Jesus Christ alone.

Does this mean that we will never doubt or question God? Abraham doubted and questioned God. He kept asking God when he would have a son so that he would be the father of a great nation. In any relationship that can be times of doubt and fear. The psalmists cry out to God all the time. Jesus called out from the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me. It is also in our times of worry and fear, when it seems like everything is going wrong, that we can cry out those same words to God. It may seem as though God has forsaken us. Faith, which is a gift of the Holy Spirit, holds on to the promise that God will not forsake us or abandon us. We wrestle with God in relation to the war that goes on, and the problems of people in the Sudan in Africa, hunger and disease all around us. At times it is hard for us to see where God is leading, and if God is

there at all. In the midst of this uncertainty, faith, founded in Jesus Christ, holds on to the promise that God will lead us through to see hope and new life. God is faithful and He has carried through on His promises all along. When everything else is taken away, God stands victorious in Jesus Christ.

What is faith? Keep on holding on. In Jesus' name Amen.