

November 10-11, 2007

John 6:41-51

“Growing in Faith”

Pr. Tom Schoenherr

This past week has been a test of faith for the people of our congregation who had surgeries, experienced the death of Bob Candela, and faced other great challenges. I want to share some of this week with you because I believe it may be helpful for us as we consider the second phrase in our Mission Statement, “Following Christ, Growing in Faith, Sharing God’s Love.”

Faith is a gift from God, a loving relationship that holds on to Christ’s hand through the joys and sorrows of life’s journey. In Martin Luther’s explanation to the 3rd Article of the Apostles creed it says,

I believe that I cannot by my own reason or effort believe in Jesus Christ my Lord
Or come to him, but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me
with his gifts, sanctified and kept me in faith...

Given that growing in faith is not something we can conjure up on our own, we also know from experience that faith can be tried and sometimes falter as we face the challenges that we have before us.

The week before last my father, who is 92, moved into an assisted living facility in Indianapolis, leaving the house that he and my mother designed, and that my grandfather built in Fort Wayne. He also had to leave his car behind, and he is not pleased to be where he is. He had fallen a couple of times in the house in Fort Wayne, and my sister, my brother and I thought it was time that he be in a place closer to where they live so that more of the family can be with him. Our family is struggling now with guilt while we try to help my father make this transition from independent living to assisted living. We need to grow in faith through the process.

This past week we had 4 people from our congregation in the hospital for surgeries and for some severe complications. When Pastor Gerike or Suzie Everingham or I go to the hospital we are aware that these are people who may be very scared of what may be happening to them, and their families are feeling much the same thing. We all need to grow in faith.

This past week Bob Candela died on Wednesday. Pastor John and I went to the house. Whenever a loved one dies there is a need for strength and growing in faith to entrust Bob and our loved ones to God. It is hard to say goodbye and let them go.

On Friday late morning, we got a phone call from our son, Neil, that his wife, Lisa, due to have their first child in February, is in the hospital. We spent much of Friday afternoon at the hospital with Neil and Lisa and Lisa’s parents trying to come to grips with this, and praying that the pre-term labor would end, and that the baby could be carried to full term. We are thankful that Lisa’s contractions have stopped, and so far the

medication is helping. When crises come we need faith to believe and trust God. Growing in faith!

Each of us can go through weeks like this. We struggle with crises and everyday challenges, and our faith at times may seem weak. We pray for growing in faith. Relying on our own reason and effort to get through the crisis, leaves us empty.

In Isaiah 55 we are called to hunger and thirst for the nourishment of faith that God gives. Amazingly and graciously God is the one who is hungering and thirsting for us. Even faith is God's gift to us for a deeper and fuller relationship with Jesus Christ.

Growing in faith is receiving and holding on to Jesus Christ, the Bread of Life. Growing in faith involves learning more of God through Bible reading and study, and living our faith through the challenges that life brings us. We grow in faith through worship as we are nourished by God's Word, songs and hymns, Baptism, and the Lord's Supper. We grow in faith through prayer, the interaction and support of the community of faith, and as we serve and care for one another, seeing Christ in the other person.

I like the picture that Joel Bretscher shared with me of us being planted in faith, nourished by God, and growing always through God's Word, prayer, worship, Baptism, the Lord's Supper, and God's people. We are grounded in the Good News of Jesus Christ and we continue to grow and in the faith that God provides.

There may be times when the challenges are too great and our faith is not there from our perspective. It is in those times when we know we can't grow faith on our own. Then the Holy Spirit, the small group, the family, and our congregation believes for us and with us until faith can grow in us again, and God's love can get through to us again.

Growing in faith is always a journey. Sometimes our faith seems very strong and sometimes very weak. Events like this past week may have us questioning our faith at times. But God's gift to us is the Holy Spirit who draws us close to God and leads us through the crises.

Following Christ, Growing in Faith, Sharing God's Love. What a mission!