

(Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.)

FAITH TRUSTS IN GOD'S PROMISES

"An illogical belief in the occurrence of the improbable. A blind leap in the dark. A disregard for all fact. A fuzzy feeling that everything will somehow work out. A firm belief in something for which there is no proof." These are some definitions I came across for the word faith. All of them fall short of God's definition of faith as recorded in our text. **Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.**

Faith is really a solid trust in things we can't necessarily prove. It's not a blind leap in the dark but one that sees God's promises and bases its trust in them. For example, faith believes that God created this universe with his word. We have no video tape proving he did but we believe it's true because God said so and he was the only one that was there. That's faith. Today we are celebrating Commitment Sunday, the day in which we put our trust in our God as we move forward in faith with our 3 year commitment for this church building and organ. As we do this, how important it is to focus on what faith really is. **Faith Trusts in God's Promises.** That's why we can move forward with absolute certainty and a sure hope.

The Bible is filled with examples of God's people moving forward in faith, trusting in God's promises. Noah, building an ark in the middle of the desert, trusting in God's promise that this ark would save him and his family when he sent the Flood. Moses going to confront the most powerful ruler in the world after God spoke to him from a burning bush promising Moses that he would lead his people out of their slavery in Egypt. Joseph taking his pregnant fiancé Mary to be his wife after an angel told him in a dream that she had not been unfaithful but was going to give birth to the Savior of the world. Talk about faith that trusts in God's promises.

There is one example though that sticks out in my mind that can teach us a lot about faith and that is Abraham. One day God came to Abraham and said. **Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you. I will make your name great and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you and whoever curses you, I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.**" God tells a 75 year old man and his 65 year old wife to just get up and leave family and friends and go to a destination he would tell him later. Who in their right mind would just get up and go? Abraham and Sarah. Why? They moved forward in faith that trusted in God's promise that he would bless them; make them a great nation meaning they would have a child; and from his descendants would come the promised Messiah. Now that's what I call being sure of what they hoped for and certain of what they did not see. As we heard in our first lesson, as they moved forward in faith, they had their moments of stumbling with doubt. When that happened, God once again reminded Abraham of his promise and Abraham believed God and God credited it to him as righteousness.

My friends, as we make our journey through life, aren't God's promises what keep us moving forward in faith? We don't know what each day is going to bring and yet God promises that he has plans for us, plans not to harm us but to give us hope and a future. We need that promise because life can be tough and stressful. Maybe you are having job problems; maybe you are wondering what you will do when you get older. Will you get the job you want when you graduate from college? Maybe you are feeling the weight of worries and responsibilities when it comes to parenting or taking care of an elderly and failing parent. Are you dealing with any health issues or some financial concerns about the future and your retirement? Maybe you are concerned about our country both politically and immorally. It's not always easy to move forward in faith and confidence. We must confess instead of moving forward, we sometimes stumble with doubts and fears. Being a sinner in a sinful world can do that to you. Yet, what is faith? Faith is trust in God's promises of his presence, his love, his care and watchfulness, his power, his forgiveness, his salvation that is ours through Christ Jesus.

God has his plans for each one of us, plans to prosper us and give us hope. That showed especially in his plan of salvation. What a plan it was! After Adam and Eve sinned, they had no hope. They knew they deserved damnation in hell and there was nothing they could do about it. The same was true for every one of their descendants. God gave them hope when he promised he would send a Savior who would crush the devil's head. That Savior was his one and only Son who humbled himself and became a man. Jesus placed himself under God's law that demands to be kept perfectly so he could keep it in our place. He humbled himself and allowed people to arrest, beat and whip him and finally, nail him to a cross. He humbled himself by allowing his heavenly Father to punish him for the sins of the world with the pain of hell itself. Then Jesus died. That was not the end. On Easter morning Jesus rose from the dead telling the world that he had won forgiveness and salvation for all. These blessings become ours as free gifts through faith in Christ Jesus, faith the Holy Spirit worked in our hearts through the Gospel in Word and Sacrament, faith that trusts in God's promises.

That faith shows in our daily lives. Why do you come to church every week? It's because you trust in God's promise that through the Word and Sacrament, you receive the forgiveness of sins and the food your faith needs to survive. Why do you say bedtime prayers or pray when you or a loved one gets sick? You trust that God will hear and answer your prayer in the way he knows is best. How in the world can anyone take out a 30 year loan on a house? After prayerful planning and looking at the blessings God has given you, you move ahead trusting that just as God has provided you with the income necessary to pay your bills, he will do the same in the future. Why do parents bring their children to have water put on their heads and God's Word spoken? It's because you trust God's promise that in Baptism, the Holy Spirit washes away the baby's sin and brings that child to faith in Jesus? Why do you come up to the altar and feast on the bread and wine of Holy Communion? You trust in God's promise that you are receiving your Savior's true body and blood for the forgiveness of your sins and the salvation of your soul? How do you know for sure if your sins are really forgiven? You don't see or really feel anything. How do you know for sure that as you stand by the grave of your Christian loved one that he/she is enjoying life in heaven? Is there really such a place as heaven where everything is perfect or is heaven just something man made up to make us feel good? We move forward with absolute certainty and a sure hope because faith trusts in God's promise that the blood of Jesus purifies us from every sin and that Jesus himself said. **For God so loved the world**

that he have his one and only Son that whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. We can't see forgiveness or heaven. Faith trusts in God's promises that they are real; that they are ours through our Savior Jesus Christ. **Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.**

3 years ago, we had our Excellence for Christ building fund appeal, asking God to move the hearts of our people to make a 3 year commitment so that we could move forward and build a new church to his glory and praise. A little over a year ago, we had our first worship service in this beautiful church. We are not done yet. We still have a remaining debt. In a few moments, members of Zion will be coming forward in faith as they lay their pledge for their 3 year commitment at the altar of our Lord. Why are you going to make such a sacrifice of love? There are two reasons. First of all, because of the greatest sacrifice this world has ever seen, Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. Our sacrifice is really nothing compared to his. **We love because he first loved us.** Secondly, we trust in God's promise that when we give joyful, firstfruit offerings to him, he will see to it that we have more than enough to take care of the rest of our earthly needs. He will continue to provide for us in a generous and loving way. What an opportunity we have to show our love and thanks to him by our gift that will support the Gospel ministry of our congregation! Think of it. God uses sinful human beings like you and me to accomplish his purposes. How humbling, and at the same time, what a blessing and privilege!

My friends, we have so many examples in the Bible of people who trusted in God's promises, moving forward with absolute certainty and a sure hope. Did God ever fill their lives with blessings! We still have so many examples today with you, the people of Zion. Every morning is a day in which we begin and move forward in faith, trusting in God's promises that will never fail. Every night we lay our heads on our pillows with the absolute certainty that every sin of that day has been washed away in the blood of Jesus and because of that, we have the sure hope of heaven. My friends, move forward and continue to move forward in faith, faith that trusts in God's promises; faith that finds comfort and strength in God's promises; faith that is absolutely sure of what we hope for and absolutely certain of what we do not see. Amen.