



The Worth of Faith
2nd Sunday of Easter
I Peter 1:3-9
April 19, 2020

I choose the scripture passage I am about to read several months, before the pandemic. It is from the lectionary today, and is about the Resurrection. My original title for my sermon today was “Resurrection Happiness,” because it seemed like such a happy passage about the resurrection. Until I learned that the book I Peter was written to Christians who were being persecuted for their faith in Christ. It is a passage of encouragement in difficult times. So I changed my title to “The Worth of Faith.”

So, let’s see what we can take from our passage today, to hear what God has to say to us.

Let us pray: Speak to our hearts, risen Lord. Open our ears to hear the resurrection story anew. May we hear and respond with confidence and renewed faith. In the name of Jesus, our word of life. Amen.

Read I Peter 1:3-9.

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, ⁵who through faith are shielded by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. ⁶In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. ⁷These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. ⁸Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and

glorious joy, ⁹ for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

In the past several weeks, as I read this passage again and again, I noticed a word that kept jumping out at me: faith. It is mentioned 3 times in this short passage.

I especially noticed this phrase: our faith is “of greater worth than gold” (verse 7). Gold is of great worth. I have come to believe that faith is of great worth to God, and it is of great worth to us.

The gospels are filled with stories of people’s faith that make Jesus marvel. But what is interesting is many of these stories where the person is showing great faith is placed right next to stories of the disciples who show little faith.

Here’s one: In Matthew (chapter 14), the disciples are in a boat when suddenly a big wind comes creating waves that almost over take their boat. Jesus appears to them walking on water. Peter is so excited that he asks Jesus if he can do it, too. Jesus says come. As long as Peter keeps his eyes on Jesus, he walks on the water. But once he notices the wind and waves, he begins to sink. Jesus saves him and says, “You of little faith.”

Shortly after that story (Mt 15), Jesus encounters a Canaanite woman (in other words, someone not Jewish, someone outside Israel) who asks Jesus to heal her daughter. He strikes up a rather confrontative conversation with her, but she holds her own. Jesus marvels and says, “Woman you have great faith! Your request is granted.”

As the disciples watch and hear Jesus’ conversation with this woman, I wonder if Peter is thinking about that time when Jesus said to Peter, “You of little faith.”
Ouch!

Jesus notices our faith. It is of great worth to God.

In the Gospel of Luke (chapter 7), a Roman centurion sends his servants to Jesus asking Jesus to come and heal another one of his servants. On the way, the centurion sends friends to Jesus asking Jesus to not come into his house. Just say the word, the centurion says, and my servant will be healed. Jesus responds, “I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel.” And heals the servant without seeing him.

“I have not found such great faith even in Israel.” Jesus is saying the centurion’s faith is greater than any Jewish person in Israel, even the rabbis. Here is a man who simply knew who Jesus was, what he was able to do, humbly asked him, and trusted that he would receive what he asked for.

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Shortly after this story (Luke 8), Jesus and the disciples are in a boat and a storm develops. Jesus is so tired that he is asleep in the boat. In a panic, the disciples wake him up saying they are going to drown. Jesus calms the storm, turns to his disciples and says, “Where is your faith?” Are they thinking about that Roman soldier that Jesus said had the greatest faith in all Israel? Ouch!

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And actually, right before the story of the centurion (Luke 5), Jesus was in a home and teaching the leaders of the law. The house was so crowded that when some men came carrying a man on a mat who was paralyzed, they could not get in.

Being creative, they went up on the roof, made a hole in the roof, and lowered their friend down to Jesus. The passage says when Jesus saw the faith of the men, he healed the paralytic.

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There is a powerful story in the Bible about a man named Job. The story begins with the devil paying God a little visit and the topic of conversation is Job's faith. God is proud of Job's faith and kind of boasts about it. Satan says to God: Job's faith is so strong because nothing ever goes wrong in his life.

To prove that is not so, God allows the devil to cause havoc in Job's life. Job loses everything...his livestock, his money, his family, his health. Throughout it all, he remains faithful, and Job's relationship with God is deepened and strengthened. At the end of the story of Job, he sees God in a new way and God blesses him.

This story reveals that not only is our faith important to God, faith is of great worth to us as well. It is more valuable than gold.

So, what is faith?

Someone said faith is taking the next step when you can't see the entire staircase.

Faith is being able to keep afloat in dark circumstances, even what we are encountering right now in this pandemic.

Faith is strengthened when we choose to believe in the unfailing faithfulness and love of God, no matter what events surround us.

Faith is trusting that if we love God, God works all things together for good.

Faith is the strong conviction that no matter what happens God will never leave us nor forsake us.

Faith is a radical reliance on God. Our passage says, "Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy,

I do not pray for success, I ask for faithfulness. (Mother Teresa.) Which is of great worth to God and to us.

Our passage in I Peter is about faith, but it is surrounded by the resurrection. Peter says that real hope lies in the Resurrection that no matter what happens in this life, Christ has won for us an inheritance in heaven that is imperishable, undefiled and unfading.

The resurrection is our defining story. This is why it was so hard not to come to church on Easter and be together to celebrate the Resurrection.

The resurrection means Jesus has the final word. "Knowing that Jesus will have the final word gives us courage when we face the problems of our time....because of the Resurrection we are able to face those things with hope and great courage." (Hamilton)

This gives us hope because the coronavirus will not have the last word.

Faith is of great worth to us.

Faith is believing that something better is coming. Our passage ends with these words, "you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls."

I end with a story that some of you may know, but it fits here. There was a woman who had been diagnosed with cancer, and had been given three months to live. Her doctor told her to start making preparations to die, so she contacted her pastor and had him come to her house to discuss certain aspects of her final wishes.

She told him which songs she wanted sung at the service, what Scriptures she would like read and what she wanted to be wearing. The woman also told her pastor that she wanted to be buried with her favorite Bible. Everything was in order, and the pastor was preparing to leave when the woman suddenly remembered something very important to her. "There's one more thing," she said excitedly.

"What's that?" came the pastor's reply.

"This is very important," the woman continued. "I want to be buried with a fork in my right hand." The pastor stood looking at the woman, not knowing quite what to say.

"That shocks you, doesn't it?" the woman asked.

"Well, to be honest, I'm puzzled by the request," said the pastor.

The woman explained. "In all my years of attending church socials and functions where food was involved, my favorite part was when whoever was clearing away the dishes of the main course would lean over and say, 'You can keep your fork.' It was my favorite part because I knew that something better was coming. When they told me to keep my fork, I knew that something great was about to be given to me. It wasn't Jell-O or pudding. It was cake or pie. Something with substance. So I just want people to see me there in that casket with a fork in my hand, and I want them to wonder, 'What's with the fork?' Then I want you to tell them: 'Keep your fork...the best is yet to come.'"

So the next time you reach down for your fork, in faith, let it remind you that there is something better coming.

Affirmation of Faith

Join me in a litany. When you hear me say, "There's something better coming," your response is "Keep your forks."

- Easter is an opportunity to renew our faith. There's something better coming; "Keep your forks."

Faith is taking the next step when you can't see the entire staircase. There's something better coming; "Keep your forks."

True faith is being able to keep afloat in dark circumstances. There's something better coming; "Keep your forks."

Faith is strengthened when we choose to believe in the unfailing faithfulness and love of God, no matter what events surround us. There's something better coming; "Keep your forks."

Faith is trusting that if we love God, God works all things together for good. There's something better coming; "Keep your forks."

Faith is the strong conviction that no matter what happens God will never leave us nor forsake us. There's something better coming; "Keep your forks."

Faith says we have an inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fade. There's something better coming; "Keep your forks."

Have faith, my friends. Jesus notices. It is of great worth to God and great worth to you in the world now and the inheritance to come. Amen.