



“Together We Do More: Wrestling with Faith”

20th Sunday after Pentecost
5:30 pm Saturday, October 1, 2016
8:15 and 11:00 a.m. Sunday, October 2, 2016
The Reverend John H. Brock
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church
Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

Luke 17:5-10; 2 Timothy 1:1-14

Grace to you and peace, from God who is, who was, and who is to come. Amen.

Increase our faith! This is what we heard the disciples ask of Jesus in our gospel reading this morning. It almost sounded like a demand of him: *Increase our faith!* The way it's presented in our lesson, it seems to be coming from out of the blue, like a toddler demanding a toy while at Giant shopping for tonight's dinner.

But it does **not** come from out of nowhere. It's a very *specific* response to something that Jesus had just told them, in the preceding verses that we don't get in our reading. In those verses, Jesus seems to go off on a bit of a tangent from the story he had just told them - remember what we heard last week, about the rich man being tormented in Hades while Lazarus, the poor man who used to hang out in front of the rich man's house hoping to get some of the scrapes from his table, rested comfortably with Abraham in a place of comfort.

Jesus finishes that parable and immediately jumps into talking about not leading children astray, for

² It would be better for you if a millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea than for you to cause one of these little ones to stumble.

And then Jesus tells them to forgive those who offend them AND then repent of that offense, regardless of how many times a day that offense happens. I know how I react when some yahoo cuts me off in traffic, if I have to forgive him, I'd ask for **my** faith to be increased as well.

This whole issue of faith, we get it in our reading from Timothy as well. This is Paul's *second* letter to this younger man. We learn way back in Acts 16 that Paul is apparently acquainted with Timothy's Jewish mother and grandmother, and that Timothy's father is Greek. So Timothy can relate to a couple of different cultures. Paul reminds Timothy of his faith heritage, that his mom & grandmother are women of faith; not only women of faith, but followers of Christ.

He also reminded Timothy (in his *first* letter) of his own journey of faith: how Paul has his own parents to thank for raising him in faith; how Paul was chosen as the righteous guy to hunt down those heretic followers of Jesus; but mainly Paul is thankful for his encounter with that same Christ on the road to Damascus.

What Paul DOESN'T say outright, and perhaps he should, is that God does **Not** have grandchildren. Each of us is responsible for our own faith. We cannot say, 'oh, my parents, my grandparents believed, so I'm all set.'

We were reminded of this in part this morning, when at 8:15 worship the parents of our Third graders were given Bibles that they then presented to their child. We did this to help them fulfill part of those vows that they made when that child was baptized. Those parents made a promise, among others, that as their child got older, they would put in their child's hands the scriptures. That is so those children, those students, will come to know that faith as their own, and not something they do because mom or dad says so.

Martin Luther also took that very much to heart - that's why he wrote the **Small Catechism**, in order to help people understand and grow their own faith. Paul understood, just as Luther understood, that we cannot rest on the laurels of our parents and grandparents. We cannot claim the faith of someone else, regardless of how close we might be to that person. We can LOOK to the past to help build our present and plan for the future, but we cannot return to the past.

And see, this is the point at which I sat and struggled with this message. Because, in my mind, I kept circling back to us, here, at Trinity, and what we're doing right now, this whole survey and listening thing.

Did you know, Trinity Lutheran Camp Hill is a child congregation of Trinity Lutheran, Mechanicsburg? Which, in turn, is a child congregation of Trindle Springs Lutheran? If you get out a map (if you still have one of those paper things), or look online at *Mapquest* or *Google Earth*, you'll see that each of those congregations are about a horse and buggy ride apart. Any one here use a horse and buggy as your primary mode of transportation?

In 1898, the fine Lutherans of Camp Hill petitioned for, and received, permission to form their own congregation. They saw a need for Lutheran **mission** and **ministry** in Camp Hill. They were, as I said, sponsored by the fine folks of Trinity Lutheran Mechanicsburg.

That small group of Lutherans met at first at an orphanage (a structure that no longer stands) a little bit west of our current location on Market Street. They continued to meet there for several years until that space no longer met the *needs* and *ministry* of the congregation.

And so, in the early 1900's, we built our first sanctuary, on Market street. It stood where our current Education Wing is. There are a couple of representations of that original structure around here. There is an oil painting in the narthex, but the one I like best is a wood carving that hangs in the second floor hallway going toward the nursery.

Anyway, during its fifty plus years of service, that structure served us long and served us well. And when we, as a congregation, realized that it was no longer able to meet the *needs* and the *mission* of this congregation, we, as a congregation, chose, for a *second* time, to build a facility that *would* meet the **mission** and **ministry** of our

congregation.

So here's what I mean to say by telling us, by reminding us, of our history:

It is the *tradition* of this congregation, that when our facility is *no longer* meeting the mission and ministry our congregation, we make something that does meet our mission and ministry.

We step forward, in faith. Just as Paul encouraged Timothy to do. And we step forward, in faith, proclaiming the gospel. We do not rest on the what our congregation has done in the past, no matter how good that ministry was, no matter how much we might have loved that ministry.

We are striving to work together to determine what our *mission and ministry* will be. We are striving to work together, to determine:

how we can grow in faith as a congregation;
how we can reach out in ministry to our immediate community;
how we be a positive influence in this world that is working so hard to be derisive.

But as Paul reminded Timothy, and as the disciples asked of Jesus, we are called to *move forward* in **faith**.

So, in the weeks and months to come, as we struggle, together, striving to determine where we would like to go as a congregation, what we would like to do, what our mission and ministry will be, let us move forward **in faith**. Let us *have* those conversations, **together**, in faith. And in those times when we falter, because we **will** because we are humans, and humans mess up, may we, together, cry out, *Lord, increase our faith!*

Amen.

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