

Great Is Thy Faithfulness

It's clear from the lessons today that *the focus is on faith*. Abraham struggles in his faith, lamenting to God that even though he had been promised a child, he still hadn't received a child. *"I'm not getting any younger here, Lord!"* If you pay attention to the text, God takes Abraham outside under the bright blue daytime sky and tells him to count the stars. Abraham knew that a sky full of stars was up there, but because of the bright blue sky of daytime, he couldn't see any of them. *"So shall your offspring be,"* declares the Lord. And this is when we're told that Abraham believed God and His promise, and God counted this belief/faith as righteousness. *He believed in what he heard; not in what he saw*. Abraham was justified because of his faith in God's Word and promise.

Consider, also, the account of poor old Lazarus and the anonymous rich man. **Both** these men exhibited faith. I know that sounds strange, but it's true. The faith of Lazarus is a no-brainer, right? In spite of his misery, he believed. What strikes me the most is the fact that we *never* hear Lazarus **complain**. *Not once*. Even Abraham lamented when things didn't go according to his plan or timeline. The psalms are filled with laments. *Not Lazarus*. Not once does he lament his low standing or the crosses he is forced to bear. Not once does he try to make a deal with God or complain that it's *not fair* that the unbelieving jerk gets all the breaks, and he gets nothing but pain and misery and abandonment. *How many of you can say that?* We don't hear any of that. **How's that for faith?** Lazarus trusted in God, and he was saved through that faith. But let us not forget the fact that the rich man had faith too. He trusted. He just trusted in the wrong things. His faith was in himself and his stuff—his observance of the law; his bloodline; his wealth and material goods and social standing. *That faith didn't save him though, did it?*

Like I said, today's lessons are all about faith. But...as simple as all this is, what if our focus on faith is focused on the wrong thing? ***What about the faithfulness of God?*** That's really what these lessons are all about. Abraham trusted in God's faithfulness. God made a promise, and He would keep it. ***Abraham trusted in this***. Lazarus trusted in God's faithfulness; His Word and promise that declared Lazarus to be His own child in/through faith. In spite of all the tumults and terrors that Lazarus experienced; in spite of all the wretched crosses he was bearing in life, he trusted in the fact that God was faithful and just, and that God would keep His promise to deliver him from this veil of tears home to the heavenly feast table already prepared for him before the foundation of the world. God kept that promise. Lazarus was saved through faith in God's faithfulness.

And as for the anonymous rich man... ***God is faithful and just.*** God keeps His Word. The anonymous rich man didn't believe it. The fruits he bore in life were proof of this. He didn't hold fast to God's Word. He ignored it. *Carpe Diem, fat, dumb, and happy!* And when his life was unexpectedly demanded of him, he had **nothing**. In spite of all that he had in life, he was without saving faith in God's Word. His faith in his genealogy and material wealth and social standing could not and did not save him. Through the likes of Moses and the prophets, God made ***abundantly clear***—time and time again—that such a faith **does not and will not save**. Only faith in God's promise of grace, mercy, and forgiveness is saving faith. Only faith in God's Gospel promise, who would take on flesh and actually be God's grace, mercy, and forgiveness in the flesh, is saving faith. God didn't send this man to hell. This man sent himself to hell by rejecting God's Word and promise. God is faithful and just.

Look to the incarnation of Christ. Look to the angelic visit to Mary, announcing her pregnancy. Look to the manger. Look to the angelic announcement to the shepherds keeping watch over their flocks by night. ***Behold God's faithfulness.*** God keeps His Word. In the person of Christ is the promise of deliverance that God first made in the Garden of Eden, ***in the flesh***. Here is God's Gospel in the flesh...for you, for me, and for all who are descended from Adam. **Look to this cross. Here is God's faithfulness and justice.** All sin for all time is put on Jesus. This is important. God doesn't let sin slide. He doesn't wink at it or ignore it. He doesn't give it a free pass if you're nice or generous with your money or have a lot of degrees or high social standing. God doesn't let your sin slide simply because your grandma was a good Christian. Nope. ***All sin for all time is accounted for. It's all paid for—in full—with the lifeblood of Christ Jesus.*** God, who sent His only-begotten Son to live and die for us, is faithful and just.

Look to the cross. **Here is God Himself in the flesh.** Here is the One who promised to save His people from their sin, and here He is doing just that—faithful to His Word. God Himself lays down His life for you. He sheds His blood for you in order to atone for your sins. When you really think about it, this is actually quite **unjust**. The innocent dies for the guilty. The righteous dies for the wicked. Our sins—each and every one of them—are laid upon Him. His perfect righteousness is imputed to us. ***He gets what we deserve, and we get what we don't deserve—the mercy, grace, and incomprehensible love of God.*** And listen to the words He speaks from that cross: *"It is finished."* He keeps His promise. He delivers on His Word. It is finished. All sin for all time is put to death; paid in full. God is faithful and just. And it is faith alone in this faithfulness of God alone—the all-atoning sacrifice of Christ alone—that saves. Faith alone, grace alone, Christ alone.

And one last thing before we call it a day: This cruciform faithfulness of God isn't just a one-time event in the past. ***He IS faithful.*** God's faithfulness continues to extend into your lives and your very presence this very day (although, like Abraham and that bright blue sky, it is veiled and apprehended by faith alone). Look right here (*baptismal font*). Here is where God made you His own. Here is where God brought His victories over sin, death, and the grave to you, putting His name upon your head and your heart, marking you as one redeemed by Christ the Lord. Look to this altar. Look to this rail. Look and listen. Here is where your God and Lord ***continues*** to keep His promise to abide with you always, even to the end of the age.

Let that sink in. No matter how bad things may get. No matter how bad things may seem, your God and Lord **never** leaves you, forsakes you, or abandons you. He is faithful. ***He is with you always, right where He promises to be***—His Word and Sacraments—veiled beneath ordinary and unassuming elements, but still really and truly here. We may not see Him in all His glory, but by faith and through faith we know and believe the Truth. We trust what He says. We have faith in His faithfulness. Folks: No matter how bad things may get—***even as bad as Lazarus, if that's even possible***—God remains your loving, merciful, gracious God and Father. Because of Christ's all-redeeming death and resurrection; because of your baptism into His death and resurrection, nothing and no one can ever take this from you. He has promised this, ***and great is His faithfulness.***

Yes, these lessons are indeed all about faith. This is what it means to have saving faith; the same faith of Abraham; the same faith of Lazarus—***faith in God's great faithfulness.*** By the working of God's Holy Spirit in these, His means of grace—Christ with us in His Word and His Sacraments—may you see, may you hear, may you trust and rejoice in His great faithfulness, now and into all eternity.

In the name of Jesus... **AMEN.**