

Trinity 7
 July 26, 2009
 Gen. 2:7-17; Rm. 6:19-23; Mark 8:1-9

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Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

The appointed psalm (antiphon for 33) for today opens with these words, **“By the Word of the Lord the heavens were made, and by the breath of His mouth all their host.”** Our Old Testament lesson from Genesis tells us, **“...then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature... And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”**

God in His goodness, out of nothing, speaks into existence an awesome creation. God, Who is Life Himself, breathed life into the whole world. There was no sin, no death, and no tears. As you know, Adam sinned against God and all mankind fell in Adam's fall. Because of this original sin, we, children of Adam, have lost the image and likeness of God. We don't have a free will, but a will that is, from our conception, bound to sin--a will that is hostile to God. And like Adam, we shall surely die. **The wages of sin is death.** We, by nature, are born dead in our trespasses. We are born rejecting God. We, and that includes all the world, have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. We are all by nature, even cute babies, slaves to sin. This is real sin. This sin earns the wage of eternal death and hell. Sin is our fault and it would be just for all people to go to hell to pay the last penny.

In God's righteous judgment He condemned the sin of Adam and Eve, who ate the forbidden fruit, and He justly barred them and all their children from the tree of life. Yet, in His great mercy, He promised salvation by a second Adam, His Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, and made His cross a life-giving tree for all who trust in Him.¹

So, here comes the important question, “How do you know that you are saved from your sin?” Well, as good Christians, you know it is not by your works. You know that your works under the Law do not earn you the wages of eternal life. So, if it is not works, it must be faith. *Sola fide, right?* Most Christians, even in heterodox denominations, will say that the difference between heaven and hell is the difference between a believer and an unbeliever. Those who have faith go to heaven--and whoever doesn't believe is already, and will be, condemned on the Last Day. And we can nod our heads in agreement.

But here is the danger that I warn you of this morning. This danger is always lurking and it is a very popular error in American Pop Christianity. “How do you know you are saved?” They answer: “Because, I believe.” Yes, you heard me correctly. If you look to your faith for your salvation then you are in trouble. If you answer the question so, you are really saying this, “How do you know you're saved? Well, I believe that I believe. I have faith in that I have faith.” Friends, this is not where God wants us looking and this is not the proper meaning of *sola fide*.

¹ Lutheran Service Book, p.209.

If we look inside to try to see our faith we will also find our doubts. We will see our sin. If it is your faith that comforts you, then it must be a perfect faith. Do you have pure faith? Or, do you doubt? Is your faith always strong so that you trust the Lord Who created you and all that exists in 6 literal days—that He will take care of your mortgage, your retirement, your loved one, or your illness? Or, is your faith like the disciples in our Gospel lesson? After witnessing many miracles that Jesus performed, including Him feeding the crowd of 5,000 plus women and children, they say this when He is faced with a crowd of 4,000. **“How can one feed these people with bread here in this desolate place?”** O, you of little faith. Is your faith at times like that of denying Peter and rejecting Thomas? Sure, sometimes your faith seems strong like you can walk on water to meet your Lord, but at other times you see the storms of life and you doubt and sink.

Those who look to their faith for comfort of salvation usually end up self-righteous, thinking they do have good enough and strong enough faith. Or, they worry and dedicate and rededicate their lives to be sincerely faithful, but fail time and time again. Furthermore, they also tend to make this error. They think that faith is something that they control. They think faith is a rational choice to accept facts. Has this error also crept into your thinking? Do you think you can choose to believe or choose to believe more? If you do wrongly think this way, then why do you ever doubt? Why not turn-up the dial and have strong faith all of the time? Thinking that faith is something that we control is a sad error and not very comforting. When faced with cancer, a dying relative, or a difficult marriage and family, it isn't very comforting to hear the words, “You just gotta have faith.” Who among would choose to worry if it were simply a choice? No, we are not to look to our believing for comfort and hope. If it is your faith that brings you comfort, then your faith must be sinless. You must fear, love, and TRUST God above all things. Do you trust Him more than your bank account, your intellect, or anything else? No, no one born from the first Adam believes well enough for salvation.

The second Adam, Jesus, does. Jesus not only racks up perfect good works in your stead, but He had perfect faith in your place also. He never doubted God, even for a second. He always feared, loved, and trusted God above all things. The second Adam did what the first couldn't. Furthermore, the second Adam paid for the sin of the first Adam and all his children. This includes you and the whole world. Jesus died as the biggest sinner in the world. He hung on the cross for your doubts, your arrogance, and your despair. Jesus' work is compassionate. He always has our best interest in mind. He has compassion and takes care of the big thing, our salvation from sin and death, as well as the little things. Like in our Gospel lesson He says, **“I have compassion on the crowd, because they have been with me now three days and have nothing to eat.”** Jesus knows that you need daily bread to sustain the body. He provides abundantly for you. But more importantly, He also knows that you need spiritual food to sustain you spiritually. This He provides abundantly also. This food doesn't spoil and gives eternal life.

So, how do you know that you are saved from your sin? How do you know that the sin you inherited and commit is covered? Well, we don't know by looking to our faithfulness, but to the faithfulness of Christ. **He was faithful unto death, even death upon a cross.** He was faithful and rose from the dead for our justification. God has accepted the perfect life of the second Adam and His atoning death for the sin of the world. His blood covers your sin. Your sins and the sins of the whole world are atoned for regardless if you believe it or not.

But what about faith? Doesn't John 3:16 say, **“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”** Yes, faith trusts in the Gospel promise, but faith isn't something that we create--it is a gift of

God. **“Create in me a clean heart o God and take not Thy Spirit from Me.”** Or as Paul says in Romans, **“Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of Christ.”** This is why Christ sends preachers into the world to make disciples by baptizing and preaching all that He commanded. By nature we are dead, but the Holy Spirit in the Word of God breathes life into us and raises us from the dead. **For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

In Baptism we are covered with the righteousness of the second Adam and the sin of the first is washed away. **He who believes and is baptized will be saved. Baptism now saves you.** In your Baptism Jesus is faithful and He promises that what He won on the cross is signed, sealed, and delivered to you. Furthermore, in Baptism the Holy Spirit creates the faith that trusts the promise there given. He does it all – grace alone received through faith alone. Faith is created, but faith is passive. Faith passively receives the righteousness of Christ – *sola fide*. **For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.** This faith that is given through Baptism and teaching, even to cute sinful babies, needs to be nurtured.

I talk to many people who don't thin they need to come to Church often who say, “Well I know I believe and that is all that matters. I can believe at home.” If you say you believe that is great, but what is it that you trust? Is your faith holding on to the sure promises of Scripture or is it misguided and holding on to myths? Thinking you believe, but believing that you can believe apart from the means of grace that Jesus gives to create and sustain faith is foolish.

You need physical food to sustain your body, and you need spiritual food to sustain your faith. Though Jesus is omnipresent, He doesn't promise to be present graciously for you at your bed at home, at sports practice Sunday morning, or with you alone on the mountain top meditating. Jesus is faithful and comes to His flock that gathers around His Word and Sacrament. It is in the Church that Jesus breathes life into you. He breathed on His disciples and said, **“Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven.”** It is here that Jesus forgives sins through Holy Absolution. It is here that Jesus comes graciously to our altar giving us Himself as food for the forgiveness of our sin--and strengthens our faith in the one true faith unto life everlasting. And where there is forgiveness of sins there is also life and salvation. Feasting on Christ you have the promise that though you die you shall surely live. Though you exercising, eating healthy, receiving the best medical treatment doesn't defeat death, Christ has – as so will you.

How do you know you are saved? Because, Jesus is faithful to you even when your faith is lacking. Though we were unfaithful in the Garden of Eden, He was faithful to His promise to save us from our enemies. He was indeed faithful to His promise that, **while we were yet sinners He died for us.** He is faithful to His promise that we are justified by His resurrection. Though we are unfaithful to Him everyday, He is faithful to His promise that Holy Baptism saves us and that Holy Communion is the medicine of immortality. It is looking to the righteousness of Christ that covers you in Baptism that gives you peace, not to how great your faith is. Covered with the cross of Christ in Baptism, He will be faithful on the Last Day and raise you to life eternal--where His creation will be as He intended--without sin, death, and tears. Amen.