

TRINITY 21

October 24 2021 • Pr. D.M. Kerns

Old Test: Gen. 1:1-2:3

Epistle: Eph. 6:10-17

Gospel: John 4:46-54

Standing...

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

Faith...you hear it spoken of all the time.

Faith expects good things from God and for God to keep His promises,
even in the midst of tragedy, evil and injustice.

My hope today is...your faith is made stronger by God's Word.

Let us pray. May the words of my mouth and the meditation of all of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord—our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

Sitting

Our Gospel lesson this morning is an exercise in believing, an exercise in faith,
and it's important that we learn this lesson.

Because, of all the pieces of the armor of God
that St. Paul described in our Epistle lesson, he says,
*"Above all, take the shield of faith
with which you will be able to quench
all the fiery darts of the wicked one."*

If faith is to serve as a shield—

a protection against the fiery darts of the devil,
who endlessly aims to tempt, to create doubt and foster unbelief,
and ultimately seeks to drag you into Hell itself,
then it had better be more than a generic believing in something.

It's got to be specific.

To "just believe" is like having a shield made out of *papier mâché*.

So, let's see how Jesus forms faith.

Let's see how He molds it, strengthens it and gives it focus.

The nobleman from Capernaum is seeking Jesus.

His son is sick with a high fever caused by an illness about to kill him.

We can understand his desperation.

I'm sure he tried everything...

But this situation has caused him to look away from himself,
to look away from his own works and noble position,
and to seek help from the existence of a Healer, a Helper.

Jesus had already changed water into wine and the thought is,

this man heard about it—I mean, who hadn't? That was headline news!

If Jesus commanded water to become wine,

surely He could command his dying son to be healed.

And now, Jesus is back in the same area.

The man believed Jesus could do it—

and would do it...

if only Jesus was close enough

to where his son was,

because clearly,

Jesus can't heal from a distance.

No one can do that...

That much faith this man had—that Jesus could heal.

So, he asks Jesus to come back with him to his house.

You'd think Jesus' reaction would be,

"Sure, of course. I'll come over and heal your son right this instant!"

But that's not the response given.

Why not? Because Jesus is building faith.

A stronger faith is what this man needs—as does his entire family.

They need this more than a divine healing.

They need a faith that would last,

that would shield them from enemies

much deadlier than sickness.

When writing about the struggle you have with sin, St. Paul tells us,

*"For you do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities,
against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual
hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places."*

My goodness! We can't even see our enemies in this battle.

And because of that, left to ourselves,
there would be no hope.

But the Lord came to bring hope
and give us a strong faith.

So, without answering the man, Jesus starts with a rebuke.

“Unless you people—the people around him, including the man himself.
Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will never believe.”

Didn't the man believe already?

To a degree, but He didn't believe Jesus could heal from afar,
which means he didn't believe that Jesus is the Christ,
the Promised Messiah,
God the Son sent by God the Father.

Like so many others, Jesus was merely viewed as a special miracle man...
not the Savior from sin, death, and the devil.

To them, signs had to be seen, because signs strengthen faith.

But that's not right—not at all.

It's why the Apostle writes,

*“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for,
the evidence of things not seen.”*

Faith finds evidence in what it doesn't see.

Faith knows that God works miracles,
but faith does not rely on them,
nor does faith seek a sign.

Faith clings only and entirely to the Word of God—and it's satisfied with that.

No matter what your eyes tell you,
no matter what your reason tells you.

Faith is sustained by the Word of God—by the Promises God gives.

To think that seeing a miracle or receiving a sign

creates or strengthens one's faith...

that's akin to trying to tone or build

your bicep muscles by drinking coffee.

It's not going to work.

For you'll eventually slide right back into

fear, worry, anxiety and doubt—

none of which is from faith,

making one easy pickings

for the devil's fiery darts.

So, Jesus addresses this directly.

The people were not listening to what Jesus was saying
 or to what the Old Testament Scriptures were saying about Him.
 They were holding back judgment about Him,
 not believing in Him to be the Christ.
 Were they interested in seeing Him perform another miracle?
 Absolutely!
 But trust Him as God in the flesh?
 That was a little too much.

In his moment of crisis,
 the nobleman wasn't really interested in anything other than Jesus healing his son.

"Lord, come down with me before my son dies!"
 The man wants to see Jesus walk with him,
 to see Jesus step into his house,
 to see Jesus put His hands on the dying boy,
 and to see the healing take place.

Now look,

if Jesus is truly sent from God—which He is,
 and if Jesus truly is the Savior He claims to be—which He is that too,
 then why does He have to go to the man's house?
 If God is able to speak a word and bring the entire universe into existence,
 which we heard in our OT lesson,
 then He is perfectly capable of healing an illness
 in the same way—from afar.
 Jesus does what God always does,
 meaning, He speaks and it is.

A doctor, even the best doctor,
 would have to be present with the boy.

But not so with God. Jesus said to him, "Go your way; your son lives."
 Jesus heals the boy with a Word, from a distance.
 And He gives the man a promise...
 a promise of healing.

There was nothing to experience,
 nothing to feel or see.
 Seeing would come later.
 But first faith had to work.

The Holy Spirit's tool for creating faith and strengthening faith has always been and will always be the Word of God.

"Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God."

Before, all the man had was a general confidence in Jesus as a good man who could do miraculous things.

That's a good start, but there's nothing specific to believe.

His was a Word-less faith—

and a Word-less faith won't help much when God,

in His wisdom, allows sickness to remain,

or permits some tragedy to strike.

However, when God gives you a Word,

when God makes a promise,

now faith has something to hold onto,

something to cling to.

And beloved,

we have promises-a-plenty.

In Christ's death, there's the Promise that sins of the world are forgiven.

In His resurrection there's the Promise that you who believe in Him shall rise again.

At the font, the Promise is that by that washing,

the Spirit of God comes to you personally,

and remains with you and in you for your healing and protection.

In the absolution, the Promise of the forgiveness of sins is made without hesitation.

And at His table,

the Promise is not that Jesus make water into wine,

but wine His blood, and bread His Body,

and Christ your Meal.

Moreover, there's a Promise that God will uphold His Holy Church, making it victorious over the very gates of hell.

He promises grace and every blessing to His saints,

strength to bear you up under the cross,

providence for your body and your soul,

Fatherly guidance for your life

And, as I mentioned earlier,

even resurrection from the dead.

At just these few promises—of which there are more,
we resist the temptation to push them aside.

This is why we listen carefully to the Word of God when it's preached,
and scour the Holy Scriptures for ourselves,
looking for those precious faith-building promises of God,
which establish a shield of faith that will never fail.

The man believed the Word that Jesus spoke to him.

He doesn't need Jesus to come down to his house.

He's content to go his way, believing that his son was healed.

Can you imagine what that walk home was like...?

I believe the Devil was shooting as many fiery darts as possible
in his direction. "Your son isn't alive."

"Jesus can't do that."

And his faith deflects each one.

He goes home expecting to see his son alive,
simply because Jesus said he would be.

As he arrives home, the man found out that his son had, in fact,
gotten better at the very moment when Jesus said, "Your son lives."

The text says he himself believed, and his whole household—
including his son.

They didn't merely believe that Jesus was a great miracle worker.

They now believe in Jesus as the Savior sent from God,
who can heal from afar—

because His word is always and utterly reliable.

Beloved, this is how God exercises faith in you.

It's how He creates it and builds it.

God even stretches faith, at times, sometimes so thin you think it might break.

But God knows what He's doing.

Faith is His Spirit's creation.

He knows what it can take and what it can't.

He knows what it needs to grow,

and it grows by clinging only to God's Word.

In a culture that's constantly changing and changing for the worse,
where the people around you are floundering like drowning men at sea,
searching for anything to hold onto,
anything to believe, you have been thrown a lifeline—

The one certain thing that will hold you up for time and for eternity:
the living and enduring word of God.

In the Holy Name of Jesus, Amen.

Standing...

And now may the peace of God which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.