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St. Paul's Lutheran Church  
2100 16<sup>th</sup> Street SW  
Austin, MN 55912-1749  
Pastor Ted Barthels  
Sermon preached on  
September 1, 2019  
12<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

Scripture Lessons: Psalm 78:1-7, John 21:15-17  
Hymns: 225; 625; 624; 655

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. <sup>2</sup> For by it the elders obtained a *good* testimony.

<sup>3</sup> By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible.

<sup>8</sup> By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. <sup>9</sup> By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as *in* a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; <sup>10</sup> for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker *is* God.

<sup>11</sup> By faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past the age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised.

<sup>12</sup> Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born *as many* as the stars of the sky in multitude—innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore.

<sup>13</sup> These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced *them* and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. <sup>14</sup> For those who say such things

declare plainly that they seek a homeland. <sup>15</sup> And truly if they had called to mind that *country* from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. <sup>16</sup> But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly *country*. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.

(NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

In Christ Jesus, God our Savior, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: Christian Education Sunday --

This is often thought of as the introduction for Sunday school or associated with the opening of the school year. Yes, we should be aware of Christian education as well as being educated in other things such as reading, writing, and arithmetic, and technology and so forth. However, we also have a mindset that it is time for *children* to receive their Christian education. Without doubt that is extremely important. It is important that we not only understand that this is going on at church and our children need to be present and involved in their studies for church, but also that parents are the ones that the Lord entrusted with the Christian education of their children as a part of everyday life. For that parents and other adults need to keep up in their continuing education, continuing Christian education.

Children see and learn from the example their parents set for them. They will evaluate just how important faith is by the significance their parents place on faith in daily life. If "faith" is reserved for the occasional Sunday children will understand that faith, religion, and Jesus Himself are all "peripherals," handy to have around when needed, but not central to life itself.

That is not the way it is. That is the lesson of our text. Faith is central to life as we live it, and to set before us the goal of life. Indeed faith is the real thing, the reality of life, the thing that matters, while all the other things that grab our attention and consume so much of our time, they are the peripherals that are nice to have around, but not essential to life. If faith is then the essential ingredient for life we should be able to comprehend our continuing need to nurture and build our faith. That is done with continuing education, not on a hit and miss schedule, but with a regular immersion into the Word of God. On This education Sunday the Holy Spirit directs us in --

### **THEME: Giving Faith Its Due:**

Let us start with giving faith -

#### **I. Its Due Respect (v. 1-3)**

Hear the respect found the words of our text.

**Hebrews 11:1-3** Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. <sup>2</sup> For by it the elders obtained a *good* testimony. <sup>3</sup> By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible.

Faith is substantial. Faith is real. It is real because it is not made up in our minds. It comes to us by the powerful working of the Holy Spirit working through the Word, especially through the gospel of God's love and forgiveness in Christ Jesus. It is important that we have that as our starting point in giving faith its due.

You see, the world attacks faith as if it were based on myth, or simple tradition of men passed down from one generation to another, and spinning one way or another as it fits one's purpose. It is regarded as nothing better than superstition. This comes out of the preponderance of fables that mankind has regarded as religion, and upon

which man bases his hope for life. So much of it is silly on its face. What is the cumulative effect of all this phony baloney that is passed off as wisdom, and sacred writings of different cultures? The end is that many regard the true Christian faith as being the same thing. Indeed, many *Christian* churches now assert that many of the world's religions are legitimate paths to God. Such syncretism, a confusion of religions giving the false equal standing with God's truth, undermines faith not only in the world's view but also in the minds of many Christians.

That is the devil's ploy and so it certainly isn't giving faith its due respect. The faith that has been given you by God the Holy Spirit is not made up. It is **not** phony. The irony is that the world gives far more respect to the lies and deceptions of false religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam, than the one and only truth of God in Christ Jesus.

Give Faith its due respect. Your faith has substance. It is real and a solid foundation upon which you may build your life and your hope of heaven.

One of the most frequent attacks upon faith that we encounter, indeed we encounter it so regularly that we may fail to hear it as an attack, is the false theories regarding the origin of the universe. Even though science has thoroughly discredited the big bang theory, it continues to be presented not as theory but as fact along with the billions of years of world history that is sewn into the myth. Now how should the Christian respond, first for himself, and then to the world? It is tempting to respond scientifically. We may be tempted to point out how macroevolution contradicts the second law of thermodynamics, or the law of probability, or the law of biogenesis. So one could find oneself in a grand debate and fail utterly to give faith its due respect. One ought not believe God created the world in seven days because real science agrees with it. It is by the conviction of faith.

“By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible.” (v.3) That is not a weaker position. It is the strongest position because it is not based upon the propositions of man, but upon the very same powerful Word of God that called all things into existence.

When the patriarchs took God at His Word they obtained a good testimony. It wasn't merely that other people were saying good things about them. It was that God, *God* was saying good things about them. By the way that's grace, an undeserved kindness because it was God the Holy Spirit that created that faith in their hearts, and then God commended them for their faith, and to this day God holds the patriarchs before us as an example for us to follow. When you give faith the respect due it you are giving God the respect due Him.

Because of the continuing influence of the world, the *pervasive* influence of the world coupled with our own reason and sinful desires, it is important that we are continually giving faith --

## II. Its Due Diligence (v.8-12)

Our text holds before us the example of Abraham and Sarah. The Holy Spirit presents us with several other heroes of faith as well in this section of Scripture. Here we are reminded of how Abraham acted according to faith when he obeyed the Lord, and left his own people and went to a distant land he did not know, being assured that this land was to be given to him and his descendants. The thing is Abraham didn't have any children. And he was old! And his wife was old, well beyond the time for having children. Why would Abraham act according to the words and promises of God which were so incredible on their face? **Because they were the words and promises of God.** Sarah also, and yes it was tempting to laugh at the promises of God when they appeared to be incredible, but in the end with the power of the Spirit working in her

heart, Sarah also believed the words and promises of God. By **faith** Abraham moved; by **faith** Sarah conceived and gave birth to a son, a son she named Isaac, which means laughter. She laughed at his birth because of the joy **faith** brought to her heart, not the laughter of the skepticism of doubt.

The point for us this morning is the importance of staying focused on the Word of God, of hearing and reinforcing the truth of God's words, of realizing that it is the strength of the Word of God which shall be our foundation for faith and life. When we neglect the Word of God we will falter. When we approach our faith life with a hit or miss treatment of God's Word our faith will miss that nurturing that is to be found by the Holy Spirit working through the Word. Faith will fade and appear to be an uncertain foundation for life.

Remember that our faith and life are built upon the words and promises of God. Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Jacob, they all lived in the time of promise; we live in the age of fulfillment. What a blessing that is for us. God promised to send a Savior into the world. He promised Abraham that in his Seed all the nations of the earth would be blessed. That promise was fulfilled in Christ Jesus. Jesus was and is the incarnate Son of God who came down to earth to be our brother, to fulfill all righteousness, to bear our sin upon the cross. All the prophetic words and promises of God concerning the Savior were fulfilled in Christ. We see in the divine and inspired record of the Word of God how reliable and trustworthy God's words and promises are. The Holy Spirit has come to us through this marvel of the Gospel and opened our hearts to believe that we might have a foundation upon which we might build our lives while we make our trek, our pilgrimage through this vale of tears.

“How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord,  
Is laid for your faith in His excellent Word!  
What more can He say than to you He hath said

Who unto the Savior for refuge have fled?

“Fear not, I am with thee, oh, be not dismayed;  
For I am thy God and will still give thee aid;  
I’ll strengthen thee, help thee, and cause thee to stand,  
Upheld by My righteous omnipotent hand.”

(The Lutheran hymnal 427:1,3)

Finally we give faith its due by remaining focused on --

### **III. Its Goal (v. 13-16)**

Maybe sometimes the goal, the end of our faith planned and prepared for us by the Lord, seems so very far away that it almost doesn’t seem real. Ok, sometimes it doesn’t seem real. **It’s real.** It’s **very** real indeed! In fact it is more real than anything you can point to on earth whether that be a marvel of nature or a tremendous feat of man’s ingenuity and skill in building skyscrapers.

Again the Holy Spirit holds the patriarchs before us as examples of where faith leads us.

**Hebrews 13:13-16** These all **died** in *faith*, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced *them* and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. <sup>14</sup> For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. <sup>15</sup> And truly if they had called to mind that *country* from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. <sup>16</sup> But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly *country*. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.

Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Jacob, all those who have made this journey of faith before us, especially in the Old Testament days, did so on pure faith. They embraced the promises of God. Don’t you love that expression characterizing faith? They embraced the promises of God concerning eternal life, and freely confessed that they were strangers and merely pilgrims on earth. They didn’t

look back, or strive to hold on to a plot of dirt. They were looking for a better home, a heavenly country, a city God had prepared for them. And that is exactly what the Lord holds out for you and me. We were told in verse ten that Abraham was waiting for that city that has foundations. These are foundations that stand against all storms because they are built by God, because that Foundation is Christ. We know that Jesus went before us into death and the grave, and then rose again and ascended into heaven to lead us into that hope of everlasting life. He went to prepare a place for us. Jesus promised to come again and receive us to Himself so that we might be with Him forevermore.

This is your hope! This is the end of your faith. When the Apostle Peter wrote of our inheritance in heaven he reminded us that it is incorruptible and undefiled and cannot fade away. He wrote of our faith in Jesus, saying, “whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see *Him*, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, <sup>9</sup>receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of *your* souls.” **(1 Peter 1:8-9)**

Give Faith its due. As we proceed into our fall schedule of Sunday school and Bible class and Catechism classes, give faith its due. Give faith the respect due it as a gift of God instilled in your heart. Give faith the diligence due it by getting back into the Word, nurturing that precious faith which is your guide and stay in life, for apart from the Word faith only grows weak and falters. Give faith its due as it directs you through this journey to our heavenly home prepared for us by Christ our Savior.

To Him alone be all praise and glory.

**AMEN.**

“Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” Amen. (Romans15:13)