

"A Lesson in Faith" Exodus 16:2-21 Laetare 2022

My Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

While we Lutherans talk a lot about faith, we often do not define it very well. There is an idea running loose that faith is this private little thing that goes on inside of you. People act, and sometimes speak, as though faith was a personal opinion or feeling one has. We often pretend that someone can be secretly a Christian, without giving any evidence to the fact. We like to act as though we can be faithful without our unbelieving friends discovering who we are and what – or even that – we believe. All of the silly notions above are false, untrue, dangerous, and unworthy of a Christian – which makes their popularity among Christians puzzling.

What we need is a good lesson in faith – in what it is and in how it works. And that is precisely what we have in our text today. The children of Israel were confronted by the reality of God and His good will toward them. They had certain promises. All they really needed to do was believe. To be honest, they were not good at believing, but we can learn from their failures as well as their successes. Our theme, this morning, is A Lesson in Faith.

This doesn't start well for the children of Israel. They have just been led out of Egypt with the most remarkable signs and wonders, and they begin to grumble. They were slaves, captive and abused, and God worked the ten plagues which were mighty signs. He protected them from the effects of the last plagues, culminating in the death of the firstborn of Egypt and the remarkable Passover of the angel of death. Now, they are not only free to go, but are hurried out of Egypt. Their neighbors give them gold and silver to help speed their departure. They are saved again from the fickle mind of Pharaoh as God opens a dry pathway through the Red Sea for them, and then drowns the Pharaoh's host in the waters as they return to their former place.

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So, having been through the most remarkable few weeks or months in human history, they find themselves on the other side of the Red Sea, free and obviously blessed by God, and now apparently hungry. They have witnessed the love of God for them, and His mighty power to do virtually anything He desires, and anything that they might need. How do they respond? Do they say, We're hungry, lets ask God for some help? No. They grumble.

Don't feel superior. We are not all that different. We enjoy the blessings of God day by day, but in spite of that we all find reasons to complain about our lot. We don't know what God has planned for our immediate future here, and so we worry and complain, if not to others, to ourselves.

God is so good. He didn't swoop down on them in anger, but instead he blessed them. He heard their grumbings and decided to bless them miraculously and abundantly and see whether or not they would walk in His Word. He decided to bring birds on the wing in abundance in the evening that they might have meat, and then cause food to appear on the ground every morning, as the dew evaporated, and feed them in the most marvelous way. The morning food was some previously unknown substance that tasted sweet and good and provided all their nutritional needs. The text doesn't include all that we know now about it, including that God fed them for forty years with this wonderful food causing Manna to form every morning, six days a week faithfully for that entire time.

Manna came with a set directions from the Giver, God. The first direction was to get up early and gather it up for the day, because when the sun got hot on the landscape, the Manna would evaporate if it hadn't been gathered. The second direction was to gather only what you would eat that day. God will be feeding you every day, so you trust

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God and only collect what you need for that day. The third direction was that they would gather twice as much on the sixth day – Friday – because God was going to observe the Sabbath, and so were they, and there would be no Manna on the seventh day, Saturday.

The rules were the test of faith God spoke of. Sadly, they failed. Our text tells us that even though they were commanded to gather only for the day, and to keep nothing overnight, some of them did – and God caused it to rot and breed worms in it. Keeping it overnight was failure of trust in God – not just a failure to obey. They did not trust God to feed them adequately day by day. In fact, just four verses after our lesson ends, some of the people ignored the third directive, and did not keep the Sabbath day's manna, and went out to find food on the Sabbath, and found none. Hunger was then their reward for unbelief. The lesson in faith is highlighted by their lack of faith, rather than by their exemplary faith. And we're really no better.

No matter how well and how long God takes care of us, we can always seem to imagine that He won't, continue to do so. We fail to trust God to provide. We fail to expect God to be good. We imagine ourselves in dangers that are not real and rarely stop to consider seriously that God is with us to keep us and provide for us. God said He would be with us always, and we should trust Him both by reason of experience, and more because it is His word.

Well, just like it was for them, being less than faithful is not a winning strategy for us either. You cannot lose by doing what is right and good and faithful, and you cannot accomplish by unfaithfulness what God wants to give you through your faithfulness.

God has demonstrated His love for you. He sent His Son to die for you before you had even come along. It is tempting to think that He did that, and then you just happened to come along, but the Bible tells

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us that God knew us from the foundation of the world – that means that He knew you by name before He created the world. You are part of His plan!

And that plan is so deep and so wonderful that it included the birth of God as a man, and Jesus dying for your sins and the sins of the whole world. The cross is the emblem and sign of the love of God for you! Look there and see how much God loves you. He has claimed you as His own, and called you by name in Baptism. He has guarded you and guided you and kept you to this very moment. God loves you deeply indeed – outwardly, inwardly, physically and spiritually. He has claimed you for eternity with Him.

So how can we grumble and worry as though we have never seen or tasted the goodness of the Lord? Troubles are not fun – but God can handle them. Sickness is no joy, but God creates health and well-ness where it exists. You cannot run so far that God cannot find you or bless you or keep you. Trust God, and pray, and do what is right, and faithful. Don't be afraid to witness to Him. Don't be reluctant to trust Him. Act and speak as those who have God on their side, and blessings in their pockets. Look what He did for ancient Israel. He can meet any need – He just doesn't usually do it in such open and outwardly miraculous ways.

We have the Word of God. It is no more difficult than the promise of good food just appearing on the rocks each morning. Like ancient Israel, all we need to do is take God at His Word, and be patient. Their stumbling unbelief and unfaithfulness was met by God's goodness and faithfulness and blessing. He didn't do it because He likes grumblers and unbelief. He did it then for us now – it is a lesson in faith.

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So, look and see, hear and believe, and trust God! Learn the lesson of faith!

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.