

Faith Review Service
Sept 26, 2010 Middle Amana by Emilie Hoppe

Hebrews Chapter 10: 15 - 25

For the past few years the Elders have designated this Sunday in September as Faith Review. It was deemed appropriate and useful, for us to set aside a formal time to review our faith prior to those very important church services, our Holy Communion Service and our Covenant Service.

So the title of this service is "Faith Review." Following the spirit, as well as the letter, I did some reviewing of my own faith prior to this service in order to prepare my comments today. First I looked at the word faith and thought about what it means. Now, we all know what faith looks like and we can think of people we know or people we have read about who are faithful to God. Faith is something easier to describe than explain – but in its simplest terms faith means to be trust worthy, loyal, of firm belief. To have faith is to assent to or believe in. So to have faith in God is to say "yes" to God and to believe he is true. To have faith is to be loyal to God and worthy of his trust.

Now Let's just sit quietly here for a few moments and ask ourselves this question – Today if God were to review my faith and the fruits of my faith what would he find? Am I faithful?

Here pause.

So what did you learn about yourself?

Well, I'll tell you what I learned.

I learned that my faithfulness doesn't stand up very well to review.

Indeed the more I examine my faith and the fruits of my faith the more discouraged I feel.

My faith and perhaps your faith, doesn't stand up well to scrutiny, but here's the good news --- God's faith does!

God's faithfulness stands up to examination. Yes, when we study God's faithfulness from every possible angle: from Old Testament to New Testament from Creation to the Ten Commandments to the Gospel message as presented by our Lord Jesus, when we review God's record of faith – the fruits of His faithfulness as demonstrated in thousands and thousands of ways and millions and millions of lives, we will always come to the same conclusion.

God is faithful.

He is trustworthy and true. He is loyal. He does not give up.

So perhaps today we would best spend our time contemplating the faithfulness of God.

To do that I turned to that book many of us studied when we were young. Our Catechism. A couple of week's ago our Confirmants stood up and recited for us some of the attributes of God as presented in Catechism Part 1. Many of these answers are word for word quotes from Holy Scripture, they are here arranged in a neat, concise and easy to comprehend format. Most of us had to memorize these first few questions and answers in section I and there is good reason for this. I want to read a few of these questions and answers which are based wholly upon scripture (Read Question 4 - p. 5 - 7)

Then the whole rest of the book is devoted to proving to us without a doubt that God's word is true and his promises are worth basing our lives upon. And that of course is the message of the Bible.

In the Bible How many times does man give up on God? How many times does mankind prove itself fickle and weak - bending this way and that - falling victim to temptation and doubt, falling victim to sin and self will. Over and over again, in the Bible and in the record of human history, we see how man has failed to be faithful, yes, a few victories here and there, but in many ways, in many things, man has fallen short. But not so with God.

And it's because of that fact - it's because of God's faithfulness, not our own, that we exist.

It's because of God's faithfulness that we have an opportunity to rise above our sinful natures and rise above this earthly hell.

It's because of God's faithfulness, not our own, that we receive Salvation.

It's because of God's faithfulness, not our own, that we will be received into heaven. We don't make that happen - God does. It's by his grace and mercy that salvation is even a possibility for us. And that's the most encouraging thing of all.

For heaven is where God means us to be and we know he'll make that happen, he will rework and refashion us and make of us something beautiful and worthy before he is done with us.

Indeed He gives us our faith and helps promote its growth and development. We are not born with faith - God gives it to us and God nurtures it, giving us the wisdom and the courage to stand upon our faith. God sees us as worthy of salvation and while we ourselves may not see it, we may feel most unworthy and we may feel grimy and grubby, God sees us as worthy of salvation and so by God we will be.

As it says in our Scripture reading, in Hebrews 10 verses 22 -24

22let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and

having our bodies washed with pure water. **23**Let us hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. **24**And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.

Yes, we are weak. Yes, our faith does not stand up under close scrutiny for we make mistake and after mistake. Yes, sometimes the fruits of our faith are a little bruised and worn, but we need not be discouraged. For as our Bible tells us, "Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of FAITH having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. "

Yes, we may be a little grimy and grubby and battered by the world, we may be lacking – but we are commanded to draw close to God with a sincere heart and in full assurance – knowing that we will be cleansed and washed, made pure and made whole by our God. Because our Lord is Faithful!

That is the assurance of this message!

And what is more, our faith, as a reflection of his faith, is strengthened and built up when we draw closer to God and align ourselves more directly to him. Like when you turn a mirror to a flame, the reflected flame in the mirror becomes brighter and more powerful when the mirror is aligned to the flame, so to with our faith. Our faith will grow and burn more brightly when we turn our lives toward the Lord. When we spend time in prayer, when we spend time in the Bible, when we spend time together in worship, we are turning to the Lord and that will strengthen our faith.

And what is more, as our scripture tells us, we are to spur each other one toward love and good deeds- Have faith folks, that's what this is saying. Have faith! God is on our side and if God is on our side, what can stand in his way? So don't give up! If you have faults and failings, don't give up on yourself. If you make mistakes or do the wrong thing, - Don't give up.

Don't give up on your neighbors.

Don't give up on God.

This week Bob and I attended the funeral of a friend from Coggon Iowa – Ron Smith. Ron died last week of cancer. He was 69. At the funeral Ron's priest reminded us all of Ron's great faith – this was a man who had lost not one but two sons. His youngest son was killed in a car accident – he was a young man barely 20. Four years later Ron's eldest son, a US Marine jet fighter pilot was killed when his Harrier jet malfunctioned. So 2 sons gone in terrible accidents. Some of us would have lost our faith, but Ron instead turned to God and found his solace in faith. His Priest read a letter to us Ron had written shortly before his death which Ron thanked God for renewing his

faith and bringing him back to fold following that tragic period. Ron wrote, that he was very much looking forward to his heavenly reward – seeing his Sons again.

Even unto death Ron was confident.

It says a bit later in this same passage: So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. In Hebrews 10 verse **36**”You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised.”

We need to persevere. Keep going. Keep trying. Keep the faith. No matter what!

Why? Why should we keep the faith!

We keep the faith so that when we have done the will of God we will receive what he has promised.

And what is the will of God?

Well, That’s a topic for another commentary or two, but I think we can place our complete faith in the words of Jesus Christ who was sent by God to teach us this very thing: Jesus said:

”The greatest commandment is this - 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.'^[a] **39**And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'^[b] **40**

Love God. Love your neighbor. Love yourself. That is God’s will.

And what is it that God has promised? Simply put - He has promised us life eternal through Jesus Christ. Life eternal through Jesus Christ.

Finally, as we conclude our Faith Review, perhaps we should ask why?

Why is God faithful? Why is God constant, loyal and true?

All the words we read in our Bible. All the stories of the past, All the stories of faith and triumph, The fact that he sent his Son to us and the fact that he prepared a place in his home for us.... Why is that? All the times he has listened to our prayers and blessed us in ways that we can see and in we ways we can’t see. Why is that?

Why has God remained true to us his children though we sometimes reject him?
Why is God Faithful?

We find the answer to that in Deuteronomy 7: verses 7 – 9

7 "The Lord did not set his heart on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other nations, for you were the smallest of all! **8** Rather, it was simply that the Lord loves you, and he was keeping the oath he had sworn to your ancestors. That is why the Lord rescued you with such a strong hand from your slavery and from the oppressive hand of Pharaoh, king of Egypt. **9** Understand, therefore, that the Lord your God is indeed God.

He is the faithful God who keeps his covenant for a thousand generations and lavishes his unfailing love on those who love him and obey his commands. "

Let's read that last verse again.... He is the faithful God who keeps his covenant for a thousand generations and lavishes his unfailing love on those who love him and obey his commands.

Why is God faithful – because he loves us.

READ : Isaiah 25

Our benediction prayer is from the hymn "I Trust in Thee" by Christian Metz
Benediction:

Dear Heavenly Father
We trust in Thee our strength is in thy Word
Our way and light, our spring of life Oh Lord
In want and fear a path for us is laid
We follow Thee, Oh Lord go Thou Ahead.

As members true our faith we pledge to thee
With heart and hand and mouth most fervently
Prepare us now in time of grace to be
AS Thou wouldn't have us Lord in eternity.

AMEN

PRAYER--

Herr Jesu lass mich anfangen,
Wie Du gegangen
Und Dir zum Leben, Mein Herz ergeben. Amen

ELDERS PRAY

**Möchtet Noch jemand Den Glauben Beten? Would someone please affirm the
Apostle's Creed?**

Our Father in Heaven,

We pray for a firm faith that we would live our lives reflecting your glory and light. We pray that our faith be strengthened and perfected in Christ Jesus whose example we learn from and seek to follow. Forgive us our sins and failings Father and help us to do your Will. Make of us what you will Father we trust in you.

Dear Father we pray for our children and grand children that they may come to know you and to love you and that they might find obedience less of a burden, but more of a joyful expression of their faith. We pray for those who are suffering – those who are worried about financial concerns and job loss, we trust you to answer all our needs Lord so we place all our burdens and fears before you. We pray for those who are grieving and those who are burdened with ill health and pain. We thank you Lord for all the blessings of healing medicines and doctor's care available to us. We thank you for your care of us and for the love you show us through others who seek to help us.

Dear Father we lift up the leaders of our nation and the world that they might come to know you and to be guided by you in wisdom and truth. We pray for all those servicemen and women who are far from home serving our country. We pray for their continued safety. And Father as we praise your Holy Name we thank you for the blessings of freedom - freedom of speech and freedom of worship and we thank you Father that you have provided us with this bountiful valley for our home.

All this we pray in the name of your Son, who taught us to prayer together...

**UNSERE VATER
Our Father
AMen**