

Grace and Peace to you from God Our Father and from the one in whom we put our faith, Jesus Christ our Lord, amen.

Our theme for today is walking by faith. What is faith, and how does it shape your life? What does it mean to “Walk by faith and not by sight?” For the past couple hundred years, the power of faith has been reduced into nothing more than a head game. Faith has been coopted to mean little more than assent to a certain set of theological beliefs such as Jesus’ virgin birth, infant baptism, and the rapture - or Biblical stories that defy science such as a six day, 144 hour creation, Jonah being swallowed by a big fish, or when the sun stood still during an Israelite battle. My point is not to argue where these points are right or wrong. What I do want to stress is that if our faith is limited to defending a certain set of religious beliefs, then our faith is neither powerful nor is it life changing, and it’s not the faith Paul writes about to the Corinthians. Before we can talk about what faith is, we all must understand that it’s a gift that comes from God. God has revealed Himself to us through his mighty acts in the Bible and through His Son Jesus Christ whose resurrection gives us something to place our trust in. Without God’s mighty acts there would be no faith. There would be nothing to trust, no reason for hope. God gives us a reason to live our lives trusting in his promises because we’ve already seen the lengths God is willing to go in order to make his grace known to us. So, let’s talk about what faith means in practical terms.

Faith is first and foremost about trust. Paul writes in verse 6, “So we are always confident ...” I think we could also translate this as, “So we always trust ...” A key understanding of faith for Paul is that faith is trust -- trust in a loving God with whom we have a relationship. We trust God is at work in our world moving toward the further establishment of his kingdom. We trust God is moving in our lives in a positive rather than negative manner; in a loving rather than vengeful way. We trust God is caring for us, lovingly embracing us, and that God holds us in the palm of his hand. When we struggle with faith and trust, we become worried and anxious.

Faith is also about commitment. In verse 9 Paul writes, “So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him.” Faith is a radical centering on Christ--a commitment. We’re committed to live out God's will, so we seek to discern, to understand God's will and how we can carry it out in faithful obedience. Our relationship with God is at the center of our lives and we are devoted to that relationship. We are children of God and disciples of Christ first, above all else. Yes, that means above work, hobbies, vacations, even family. They all come in some order, after our relationship to God, through our Lord Jesus Christ. We live out this relationship and our commitment in our job, our family, and our relationships with others. When we struggle with faith and commitment, we become self-centered and rebellious.

Our faith is also about vision. Paul writes in verse 14 that, “The love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died.” For Paul faith is a unique perspective, or vision, of life. It is popular to see God as vindictive, creation as bad, and evil as the dominate force in the world. Christians adopt a different perspective. We see God as loving, creation as good, and God's love and grace as the dominate forces in the world. With this perspective we become loving and accepting of all God's creation... With the possible exception of mosquitos and poison ivy... With this perspective we live our lives as people who have been blessed and who want to be a blessing. We seek to serve rather than be served. Hope, gratitude and celebration are characteristics of this perspective of faith. Hopelessness and despair are its opposites.

Our perspective with regard to our neighbor is seen through this vision. Instead of the neighbor being someone we're in competition with, like keeping up with the Jones's', we see our neighbor as someone to love. I'm going to use an example here that might not make me the most popular person in this gathering today. I'm going to talk about our use and wearing of masks, our social distancing, and use of hand sanitizer. What purpose do these actions have in our daily lives and why should we follow these measures every day, including on Sunday? Do you try to follow them because they keep you safe? Do you rebel and not follow them because, after all this is a free country? Do you not follow them because you

have “faith” God will keep you safe from the Covid virus? I used to think we were getting more Covid cases here in Ohio because more tests were being done. I thought the tests were readily available for just about any and everyone to take. Several days ago my eyes were opened to a different reality. Our daughter had a change in her work schedule that meant she and her husband had to work on the same day. They normally are able to schedule their days so one of them is always home with their six children. Since this happened, I agreed to watch the grandchildren for the day. Unfortunately, on the night before I was to babysit, our daughter called and said three of the kids had runny noses and slight fevers. She wanted to know if we were still ok with bringing them over for me to watch. It’s a good thing my wife took that call. I’m an old softy and would have said it was ok, but she just asked, “if it was the Covid and something bad happened to me or her, how would our daughter deal with it the rest of her life.” She called off work and tried to get her kids tested for the virus. It was not available... Luckily the kids got better the very next day and show no signs of any illness. My point is, this virus is still a threat, testing is still not readily available, and we should all continue to keep our guard up. We wear our facemasks, keep our social distance of at least 6 feet apart, and continue to wash our hands and sanitize everything in sight, not to keep ourselves safe, but for our neighbor--for each other. We do it because our faith in God and in Jesus Christ informs our actions and we want to show our love

of God by loving those whom God loves. We show our love for God by our actions towards all the others whom God loves. I can't give God a present, but I can help keep this world that God loves in pristine condition. I can't buy God a gift, but I can help those who hunger, are lonely, and those who are sick and in despair. It's all part of the vision of the world we gain through faith in Jesus.

Even though these concepts of faith; trust, commitment, and vision are as old as the Bible, they're still refreshing, powerful and new. They allow Paul to conclude this section of his letter with the declaration, "If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed; see, everything has become new!" Yes, in Christ you are a new creation. Because of our faith in Jesus Christ, we are no longer slaves to sin. Christ has set you free to be his representative right here in the middle of living your life. You don't have to be a missionary like the Cheeseman's, you have everything you need right here and right now. The first thing we can do is make sure we're treating each other right by moving our chairs to a safe 6 feet apart, wearing your masks when you're inside and can't stay 6 feet apart, and remembering to sanitize all surfaces and use sanitizer all the time. It's what we do for others...

So, I'll ask again, what does walking by faith and not by sight mean to you? Is it merely agreeing with a certain set of religious ideas or blindly believing every word written in the Bible is literal and defending that belief despite massive

scientific evidence to the contrary? I propose faith is something much more powerful and much more life transforming. Faith is placing your trust in a God who is steadfast and will never break a promise. Our God demonstrated His love for you by sending his only son to take your sin upon himself and wash you with his very blood. Walking by faith means we are fearless in the face of even death itself, because we know our redeemer lives. Walking by faith means we share the love God has already given to us with those whom God loves. Walking by faith isn't about coming to Church services every Sunday because it makes you feel good. It's coming to worship the God who created you out of nothing, who redeemed you from the devil, and who sustains you through all the trouble and toil of this world with His Holy Spirit. For me, it's about coming to the altar as often as I can to receive God's embrace, God's reassurance that I'm still the apple of His eye and His beloved Child. Lord knows there's plenty of times I get the opposite message from this world. That's what walking by faith and not by sight means to me... What does it mean to you?

May you have the faith to take those steps of faith, knowing God is there walking right beside you. May your faith be powerful and life transforming giving you a vision of God's wonderful and beautiful and good creation. May your faith inspire you to even greater acts of love for one another and for all our neighbors, near and far. Amen