

August 14, 2016
 Sermon for The Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost
 St Peter Lutheran Church
 Bowie, TX
 Larry Knobloch, Pastor
 Hebrews 11:17-31, 12:1-3

J.J.- Jesu Juva—Help me, Jesus

Hebrews 11:17–31 (ESV)

¹⁷ By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, ¹⁸ of whom it was said, “Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.” ¹⁹ He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back. ²⁰ By faith Isaac invoked future blessings on Jacob and Esau. ²¹ By faith Jacob, when dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, bowing in worship over the head of his staff. ²² By faith Joseph, at the end of his life, made mention of the exodus of the Israelites and gave directions concerning his bones. ²³ By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents, because they saw that the child was beautiful, and they were not afraid of the king’s edict. ²⁴ By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, ²⁵ choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. ²⁶ He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward. ²⁷ By faith he left Egypt, not being afraid of the anger of the king, for he endured as seeing him who is invisible. ²⁸ By faith he kept the Passover and sprinkled the blood, so that the Destroyer of the firstborn might not touch them. ²⁹ By faith the people crossed the Red Sea as on dry land, but the Egyptians, when they attempted to do the same, were drowned. ³⁰ By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for seven days. ³¹ By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had given a friendly welcome to the spies.

Hebrews 12:1–3 (ESV)

¹ Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ² looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. ³ Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior,
Jesus Christ!

Amen.

Remember Johnny Lee's? You know, the one where he says that he's "lookin' for love in all the wrong places."

We do that too. We look for love—we look for God's love and for our salvation—in all kinds of wrong places, persons, and things.

We know we need to be loved, even need to be saved, but we don't always remember where it can be found. And so, we look for love as well as salvation in all the wrong places.

For some reason, we think love starts with us. We think our hearts have to want to love, and then we need to find another heart that wants to love us in return. And there are all sorts of dating sites and services to help us find love, to find the one with whom we have harmony, our perfect match. We take inventories of our likes and dislikes, our aptitudes and our attitudes, and what we're looking for in a mate.

Likewise with our gods. We decide what our god is supposed to be; he or she or it becomes a product of what we're looking for.

Is god a nice guy, a sweet grandmother, or a kindly ole elf that show up once a year with gifts and glad tidings?

Does this god love me regardless of anything I do?

Is my god near or far, imminent or transcendent?

Are our gods personal beings, or are they simply objects of our adoration or that in which we place our trust—money, pleasure, job, family, and so on?

Or are we our own gods?

Do we rely on ourselves and the labor of our hands for love and salvation? Do we claim to believe in the God of the Bible—the triune God, Father and Son and Holy Spirit—

yet still depend on our works in our church or in our home or in our vocations to make God happy with us, love us, or hold us worthy enough to come into his presence?

How many times have you heard people say, “So-and-so’s a good Christian because she or he does this and that”?

How many times have you been told that to be a better Christian you need to do something—anything?

Just take our reading in Hebrews 11, for example. These are great heroes of the faith. Look at all that they did!

Abraham offered up Isaac; Isaac blessed his sons; Jacob, wrestled with God; Joseph saved the sons of Israel from famine; Moses stood up to Pharaoh and led God’s people through the wilderness; the people crossed the Red Sea; Joshua brought the walls of Jericho down; Rahab welcomed the Israelite spies.

We could go on and say, “If you want to be a good Christian, you need to be like these people and do the things they did.”

But then we’d miss the point. This chapter isn’t about what they did; rather, it’s about God’s gift of faith to them. Missing the point, we look to the work of our hands or to gods of our own making. We look for love and salvation in ourselves and in the products of our imagination. We look for love in all the wrong places.

Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and all the rest looked to the one true God—the God who makes Himself known, who promised to come to save us, who is Love itself.

The saints of old looked to the promised Christ.

Each example the author of Hebrews gives is prefaced with the phrase “by faith.” “By faith Abraham . . . offered up Isaac”; “By faith [Moses] left Egypt”; and “By faith the people crossed the Red Sea as on dry land” (vv 17–29).

Their faith is our faith. We have the same God.

Just as He spoke to them, He speaks to us through His Word. And it is through that very same Word that we all came to the faith—*the* faith, with the definite article. As we confess in our Creed, “In the same way [the Holy Spirit] calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith” (SC III 2).

We cannot even believe in the promised Christ without the work of the Holy Spirit, who creates and sustains faith. Nothing we do can make us worthy to stand before God.

Heb 12:2 encourages us to look to Jesus, who is *“the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.”* We are to look to Jesus, for He is Love and salvation incarnate. But on our own, we couldn’t.

Thanks be to God that before we could look to Jesus, Jesus looked to our salvation. He looked resolutely toward that hill outside Jerusalem called Calvary.

There He endured the cross—suffering in our place, taking upon His flesh the Father’s full wrath, making the all-atoning sacrifice.

There He despised the shame, becoming a scandal before the devil and the nations. He was not afraid of the humiliation and the ridicule and the mocking, for He was looking to redeem us with His own blood. And after three days, He was exalted by the Father, vindicated in His resurrection from the dead, and is now seated with authority over all things.

All His enemies have become His footstool—even the false gods and works and all those things that take our eyes off Him. (Ps. 110:1, 1 Cor. 15:25)

Jesus looked to our salvation long before we were conceived and born. Jesus looked to our salvation and accomplished it, looking to us in His great and superabundant love. Jesus looks upon us and, by His might, bestows upon us His love and salvation.

As we confess, by faith in the Nicene Creed: “Who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven.”

By faith, we, too, look to Jesus. And, by faith, we see Him, we behold Him, here, in our midst, through the Means of His Grace.

By faith, we see our joining to the Lord's death and resurrection in the waters of Holy Baptism.

By faith, we trust that the forgiveness proclaimed by the pastor is Christ's forgiveness.

By faith, we discern the real presence of Jesus' body and blood in the bread and the wine.

By faith, we recognize that the Word proclaimed is the only sure and certain Word that grants life eternal.

Finally, by faith, we witness God's consoling love in our hands and in those of others.

We need not look for love or salvation in any other place than in this place; which is His place.

This is the right place. Here, Jesus is in our midst. He is our love and our salvation.

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Amen.