

"Living, Mighty, Active Faith"

September 3, 2021

James 2:18-23 "But someone will say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. You believe that God is One; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder! Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? You see that faith was working together through his works, and faith was completed by his works; and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness"—and he was called a friend of God.

Fairbanks, Alaska, is home to the largest dog mushing museum in the world. The term "mush" supposedly comes from the French word for "march" or "go." Back in the day, locals heard the French-Canadian fur trappers holler at their restless sled dogs, "Marche!" to give them permission to "Go!" To the locals, it sounded like "mush" and the rest is history. The dogs featured at the Fairbanks mushing museum are the Olympic athletes of the canine world. In a race like the thousand-mile Iditarod, the dogs will run as much as a hundred miles in a day, with each animal consuming the caloric equivalent of twelve T-bone steaks.

As with our Olympians, sled dogs come in a variety of shapes and sizes. But they hold one attribute in common: *restlessness*—an insatiable desire to "Go!" Martin Luther once described the faith that resides in a follower of Jesus in similar terms: "When it comes to faith, what a living, creative, active, mighty thing it is. It cannot do other than good at all times" (*Preface to Romans*). Luther was echoing what Saint James said: faith is working together through works (James 2:22); and what

St. Paul said—that faith *works* through love (Galatians 5:6). Like an Alaskan Husky, faith doesn't sit still.

The thing about faith is that it's not about us. We're involved. We exercise faith and live by faith. But faith is the power out in front. You and I are along for the ride. My friend from Alaska told me that sometimes people adopt sled dogs as household pets. But it often ends in disaster. The dog doesn't get enough exercise; the owner is frustrated; the dog's hyperactive, and in the backyard—holes half-way to China. Sled dogs don't domesticate. They are born and bred to work. The same can be said of faith.

Faith—it's a power outside of us; faith is out in front of us. Faith is what happens when you and I are exposed to the Word of God—in the church, when we confess our sins and hear forgiveness in the Name of Jesus; in the church's songs, Scriptures, sermons, Sacraments, and social interaction. This faith pulls you forward out of yourself, into the world, in service to your neighbors.

When Jesus says, "Mush!" you better hold onto the sled.

THE PRAYER: Dear Father, by Your Personal Word, Jesus Christ, You have created faith in my heart. By Your Spirit, help me hold on for the ride. In Jesus' Name. Amen.