

## “The Time For Faith”

Mark 4:35-41

June 24, 2018

5<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Pentecost

Have you caught World Cup fever? Are you mildly interested in the World Cup? Do you even know what I'm talking about when I speak about the World Cup? In almost every country of the known world not named the United States of America, the World Cup – a huge international soccer tournament – is the most important sporting event there is. By comparison, it dwarfs every Super Bowl, every Stanley Cup, every NBA championship, and every World Series (even onewith the Chicago Cubs and it). Every four years, this tournament causes almost every country to grind to a halt as a fervent love for soccer (or football, as the rest of the world calls it) takes over everything.

In the United States, we are different. We say that we like soccer, but we are very selective regarding a time we show that affinity for the game. We only show our love for soccer at certain times. We love soccer every four years during the time of the World Cup tournament, but the love and excitement over soccer doesn't translate over into their everyday lives. After almost every World Cup tournament, people say that now soccer will catch on in the United States and become very popular. But, as almost everyone admits, this fails to happen again and again. Soccer is not nearly as popular as baseball, basketball, or especially American football. We say that we love soccer and that it will grow here, but our actions don't match up with that supposed love. Our intentions regarding soccer are often much greater than any action we take toward soccer.

The same could be said for the concept of faith. Although more people today honestly admit to having no connection to any Christian denomination (the so-called “Nones”), this increase is not overwhelming. Many people, when asked if they have faith, claim to believe in God or, the more generic, “higher being”. According to an article in the current Lutheran Witness, around 80% of Americans believe in the existence of God/higher being. The article goes on to talk about what kind of God people believe in. But I would like to focus in on the matter of belief or faith.

What we call faith is often like what we call love for soccer. We bring out our love for and dedication to soccer when it is convenient – like at the time of the World Cup tournament – but that love for and dedication to soccer isn't shown most of the other time. As a result, soccer doesn't grow steadily as a professional sport or among the population as a whole in the United States. Instead we put that interest away and wait for the next World Cup tournament. The love for and dedication to soccer is not strong enough to have any impact in our lives between World Cup tournaments.

In the same way, many who profess to have faith in the God of the Bible only bring out that faith only on special occasions. But it seems to have no influence on their day-to-day life. All who have faith received it as a gift in the waters of Holy Baptism or through the preaching of the Gospel. They may bring out this faith on their Confirmation Day and then put it away, never to use it again. Some people bring out their faith for everyone to see on Sunday morning at worship, and then put that faith away from Monday through Saturday. It is as if there is a time for faith.

Many people only speak about faith and display theirs when asked whether they have faith or not. They claim to have faith, but that faith doesn't affect their everyday life. They are not interested in worshiping the Lord, learning His Word, or serving His people and the people of the world. Yet they would be highly offended if anybody ask, “Do you have faith?” People seem to think that faith only engages the mind and not the heart; and only affects the mind and not the body. Faith becomes solely a matter of believing and not trusting. It serves us well when things are going smoothly, but not so good when things aren't.

This way of thinking leads to surprise and shock when problems confront us. We expect everything to go smoothly for us as Christians because we believe all of the right things. We have faith. It can also cause disbelief or, at least, doubting that God can or will do anything to help us when things do go bad. We make excuses as to why we don't trust God and have faith in Him. We say, “If I could just see a miracle, then I would have a strong faith.” Or, “If I could just see Jesus, then I would have a strong faith.”

This is exactly the scenario we have in our Gospel reading for today. The disciples of Jesus Christ, like us, claimed to have faith in Him, I'm sure. They had seen many proofs of Jesus claim to be God in all of the miracles which they had seen him perform: changing water into wine, healings, exorcisms, and many other actions which showed that Jesus controlled nature and the spiritual realm. Why would they doubt or disbelieve? They had the Son of God really and truly present among them. Surely, they would have faith in all sorts of situations.

Yet, like us, their faith seemed to be one of belief only and not trust. It was a faith that served them well as long as things were going smoothly but failed them when times got worse. When they found themselves in a boat in the middle of a huge windstorm in the Sea of Galilee – the waves of the sea breaking into the boat, causing the boat to begin sinking, their faith which was, at best, only intellectual beliefs used to reinforce the good times, failed them. Even though they had seen Jesus' miracles and even though they had Jesus with them in the boat (two conditions which we say would cause us to trust stronger), they doubted.

Instead of having a strong relationship of trust through faith, the disciples panicked when they needed that faith. They tried to solve the problem themselves and failed. As a last resort, they tried prayer – asking Jesus for help – but they did it as a last resort and without much trust, as Jesus' words of rebuke would show. Their request of Jesus showed not so much unbelief as doubt. The ESV version translates their words as, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" That seems to show rank unbelief. The Greek language has an amazing way of framing questions in order to show which kind of answer is expected and, in this case, a "yes" answer was expected. A better translation might be, "Teacher, that we are perishing is of concern to you, isn't it?" In other words, they were not without faith, but they doubted Jesus highly. All of their pious pronouncements prior to the storm went out the window. Despite the proof of prior miracles and the presence of Jesus Himself and despite this being a time for faith, their faith failed them.

Our faith fails much in the same way. We claim to believe in Jesus and trust him. We haul out that kind of faith when things are going smoothly. However, when troubles surround us and things look bad, our "display faith" fails us. For some, it's a complete loss of faith. For others, like the disciples, it is a massive doubting of God's love and intention toward us. Why does our faith fail us so majorly?

We have our scapegoats for lack of faith. We may blame God's lack of power or ability to rescue us from the trouble we are in. However, remember the disciples had seen Jesus' power in his miracles. We have read their accounts of those miracles and believe them. So, that excuse isn't very valid.

We may blame God's lack of love or mercy towards us for our doubt or disbelief. However, one of the things that attracted the disciples to Jesus was His care and compassion. Throughout the Scriptures, we read of the same thing: God's undeserved love for us. It is a constant and reoccurring theme. So, that excuse doesn't hold water, either.

We may feel that we are all alone. God has abandoned us. Yet, the disciples had Jesus bodily present in the boat with them. We have Jesus truly present among us, "where two or three are gathered together in My name" and in His body and blood in the Lord's Supper. So, that excuse doesn't really work, either. What is it then?

My family says that I possess a rare superpower. I am able to fall asleep anytime and anywhere. Some people can't sleep when they are passengers in a car or airplane. Some people can't fall asleep when there is light or sound present. Some people can't fall asleep when in a hotel bed or any other bed, not their own. None of these situations provide any difficulty for me. I can fall asleep at the drop of a hat and wake up a few minutes later, fully refreshed. It is a superpower without any apparent value or neat uniform.

However, even with this special ability, I don't think I could do what Jesus did in our text for today. Despite the danger of the storm, the shaking of the boat, the noise of the wind and the waves, and the possibility of death, Jesus lay asleep in the stern of the boat. Were the sounds and the movements of the storm not present in the back of the boat? Of course not. This was a huge storm.

Was it just that Jesus very tired? Yes, but no more so than the rest of the disciples who, because of the storm, were not even drowsy. The only difference between Jesus and the rest of the disciples is that Jesus had faith in the truest sense of the word. Jesus was in a constant state of perfect harmony with His Heavenly Father and always trusted Him completely.

The disciples in that boat were not close to being like Jesus and neither are we. The answer to doubt or lack of faith is not trying to copy Jesus and His perfect faith. We can't do that. The answer is to have that state of perfect harmony with God from which faith flows. There is only one reason for us to lack faith or have a faith that doubts. It is not because the situation at hand is too difficult to trust God. It is not because God is unable or unwilling to help us so we doubt. It is not because God has abandoned us and we feel there is no reason to have faith in Him. The only reason is sin. It all started with Adam and Eve. They had every reason to trust God for He had given them everything they wanted or needed. But they didn't trust God. Satan did not tempt them to eat the forbidden fruit. Rather, he tempted them to not trust God and His Word, even though God had never given them a reason to do so.

Satan does the same to us, as well. His chief temptation is that we do not trust God and doubt His Word. That is our chief sin, doubting the Word of God. So the answer to lack of faith or a faith that doubts is not in trying harder to trust or to seek out proofs for Your faith to somehow validate it. Since the cause is sin, the answer to lack of faith is the forgiveness of sin. Jesus earned that forgiveness by His death on the cross and verified that forgiveness by His resurrection from the dead. By virtue of these actions by our Savior, we are in full and complete harmony with our God and our Father like Jesus was in the boat. The faith given to us in our Baptism is one which rightly confesses the Triune God and fully trusts Him in both good times and especially in bad times.

If we find ourselves doubting or even disbelieving God's chosen plan of action in any given situation, the first thing to do is confess that sin of doubt. It requires hearing the law of God as Jesus did for His disciples. When the disciples showed doubt, Jesus did not say, "Come on guys! You know better than that." Rather, Jesus said "Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?" When you doubt God, rather than trust Him, hear the same words to you, "Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?"

The second thing to do is to go back to our Baptism and remember that faith is not of our own doing but is a gift God has given to us. By the washing away of our sin and the gift of the Holy Spirit, we have faith in Jesus Christ. We have forgiveness for our sins, even in doubting Him. Rather than stewing over our lack of faith or our poor faith, claim the forgiveness for that doubt in your baptism.

Want a stronger faith? That will not come about if faith is something you bring out only on occasion and consists entirely of beliefs and not trust. Having a strong faith is not something God intends only for the super Christian. A faith which not only believes in God and the doctrines of His Word, but also trusts in God and the promises of His Word, is available to all in the Means of Grace.

The Word of God, which is the origin of our faith, is also the place we go to strengthen that faith. The Word of God contains the promises of God, the assurance of God, and the hope of God. If you want a faith which believes and trusts God without doubt or disbelief, the only place to get that is in the Word of God. This means regular attendance and attention in the Divine Service. It means studying God's Word with other Christians. This means reading and meditating upon the Word of God on your own. There is no other way. Jesus said, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." (John 8: 31-32) the Word of God which makes you His disciple also sets you free from fear, doubt, and disbelief.

In like manner, the Sacraments, which are nothing but the Word of God in visible form, also strengthen our faith so that we may believe and trust God for all things. In Holy Baptism, we look back to the act of baptism by which we were born again and became a child of God. Nothing can rob us of that certainty. Although baptism may have occurred long ago in our lives, it is something still active in our lives today. We do not say, "I was baptized," but, "I am baptized.," I know not only was I a child of God, but I am a child of God now and I shall remain a child of God forever. Therefore, I can trust him in all things to do what is best for me as any Father would do for His children.

In the Lords Supper, we look ahead to the fulfillment of our life as children of God. In the Lords Supper, our faith is fed and nourished so that it may be strong, without doubt, and firmly trusting that, no matter what, we will arrive to celebrate the wedding feast of the Lamb in His Kingdom which has no end.

Don't settle for a "World Cup" kind of faith which you exhibit on an occasional basis, but put away most of the time. Such a faith may do you good when things are going well but will not save you in the long run. Have a faith which believes in God always and trusts in Him during the good times of life and during the storms of life. Such a faith believes in God's grace and mercy in rescuing us from sin, death, and the devil, as well as God's decisions regarding the sufferings, the problems, and the troubles of this life. The time for faith is not a special time nor only in the darkest hours of life. The time for faith is now. The time for faith is always. Live in a time for faith. Amen