

*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.*

Hear my people...for I AM God, your God...offer sacrifice of thanksgiving and make good your vows to the Most High God...call upon God in the day of trouble and I will deliver you.

*(excerpts from Psalm 50:7-15)*

I begin today with the words of Psalm 50. This psalm is one of the psalms known as the “Psalms of Asaph”. They are referred to this way because Asaph is the composer of this psalm as well as other psalms that fall under this reference. Asaph was a gifted singer and musician as well as a prophet of David and Solomon's era. And in this psalm, Asaph is warning us to avoid hypocrisy and formalism before God.

By formalism, Asaph is warning us about excessive adherence to prescribed forms such as forms of worship without regard to the inner significance or the basing of ethics on the form of the moral law without regard to intention or consequences...in other words when we are more concerned with form and technique rather than content in artistic creation. The Priests, the Pharisees and the Scribes we read about throughout Holy Scripture are a prime example of the formalism Asaph is warning us about. This formalism appears today in our Gospel:

"Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" (Matt 9:11b)

Asaph's words ring so true for us today, in our self-glorification of our faith as a power or *our* narcissistic sense of Christianity as a sense of self-righteousness over others. In other words, we do faith correctly and if your faith is not like mine then yours is wrong. Asaph is warning us, according to Luther's commentary on this psalm, to make our sacrifice of praise or thanksgiving because we along with the devil have stolen praise and glory from God. Luther then quotes Augustine who says:

This sacrifice (of praise or thanksgiving) means to give to (God) from whom you have whatever good you have, and whose mercy forgives you whatever evil you have of your own.

Luther goes on to say that:

For when we attribute to God what belongs to God and keep for ourselves what is ours, then we keep nothing, and that very nothing is ours, but everything is God's, from whom we receive it.<sup>1</sup>

I begin with this psalm and mention Luther's commentary because there is so much laid out before us today in our lessons, but I want to begin with the call of St Matthew. The call of the disciples reminds us that God calls us all, we don't accept or find God, God finds us and calls us all. How wonderful is it that Jesus calls a tax collector to follow? We see that such a call can turn a tax collector, into an apostle or a fisherman, a zealot, and a thief into apostles, and a musician into a prophet or even turn one into a pastor, as well as God's call can turn any sinner into a saint.

All of this to set up the question that these lessons today have raised in my heart, how does someone become a Christian? I ask this because I want us all to see that the very thing that

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<sup>1</sup> *Luther's Works Volume 22, First Lectures on the Psalms I, Psalms 1-75.* Hilton C. Oswald, Editor. Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1974. From the lecture on Psalm 50, pages 232-233.

makes us a Christian is our faith and even our faith is a gift from God. Our faith is a gift from God because by our own understanding or strength we cannot believe in Jesus Christ or come to him, but instead the Holy Spirit has called us all through God's Word.<sup>2</sup> Likewise, the apostles do not volunteer nor do they "sign-up" or apply for the position of apostle/disciple.

As disciples or as people of faith, we are all called not because we have met a certain criteria, not because we have filled out the forms and applied, or that we look a certain way or live a certain life-style...rather we are disciples because God has called us through the Word. The Word of God, Jesus Christ, has called us all who have gathered in here today...God has even called to Himself those people out there who we would claim to be lacking in all the ordinary qualifications of what we claim to be a certain piety, those whose behavior we would judge as morally wrong and unrighteous, and those who we simply judge as undeserving...these are all who God calls through HIS Word, Jesus Christ.

Today throughout our lesson our trust in God is tested in that we hear of a God who justifies the ungodly, and us. Nonetheless, in all those who God calls are given the pure gift of faith. St. Paul reminds us of this today in his letter to the church of Rome:

<sup>13</sup>For the promise that he would inherit the world did not come to Abraham or to his descendants through the law but through the righteousness of faith. (*here is where we hear Aspah's warning about formalism*) <sup>14</sup> If it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. <sup>15</sup> For the law brings wrath; but where there is no law, neither is there violation. <sup>16</sup> For this reason it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his descendants, not only to the adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham...(Romans 4:13-16a)

This is not to say that the law is to be disregarded. It is to say that the law, God's Law is there to remind us of our need for Jesus Christ because we realize that we cannot earn our grace and salvation by following that law to the letter...no human being can. But the law is applied to keep us civil in our lives together and to remind us that grace and salvation come through Jesus Christ and not our works of the law.

All of us in here and those out there are given many and various gifts from God but most of all we are all given the gift of faith. But the problem I see today with our Gospel lesson, or any time we read about the miracles of Jesus or others is that they project a false sense of faith within us. What I mean by this is that, for me, miracles take away from the simplicity of faith or they lead us to think...the more spectacular the miracle the greater the faith is required. And in this thinking, these spectacular miracles of God become the only manifestation of God that we think we can experience. Moreover, if the miracles are coming from God then our faith needs to mirror the miracle so that we may be in the grace of Jesus Christ. Miracles lead us to believe or look for the impossible and when they don't happen we either say we have little faith or we simply say there is NO God. With miracles we seek the impossible...we then look for God only in the inexplicable, whereas, faith allows us to see the salvific power of Jesus Christ and to see the power of God in the possible, or the ordinary everyday workings of our lives. This is why, I

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<sup>2</sup> Kolb, Robert ; Wengert, Timothy J. ; Arand, Charles P.: *The Book of Concord : The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000. From the Small Catechism, The Creed, The Third Article: On Being Made Holy, page 355.

believe, it is hard for some to see the very presence of our Lord and the grace and mercy that is a very simple piece of bread and sip of wine because we look for the spectacular and not the ordinary like a simple everyday meal to find God in our midst.

Today in our lessons, we read of the extraordinary faith of Abraham and his trust in God. But it was God who gave Abraham a faith that happens to be the same faith we are all given. We read of the of the Pharisee's daughter being raised from the dead because he believed or had faith that Jesus could heal his daughter. The daughter cannot serve us as an example of faith, but her story shows how Jesus works in the ordinary in those marginalized by the lack of faith.<sup>3</sup> We see also that the authority of Jesus extends beyond human restraints and conditions. But more than this may we see that the gift of faith that we are given is not only a gift for ME...it is also a gift that others share in the benefits as well. We too like the Pharisee's daughter are raised to new life when we believe or have faith in the promise made to us all in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

We also read about the woman in our Gospel today who for me exemplifies deep but very simple faith. When looking at this part of the Gospel ask yourself, is she healed because she touched Jesus? No she is healed first because Jesus tells her she is made well as Jesus tells us all...your faith has made you well...just as he says to each of us every week...this is my body, this is my blood. When you say "amen" upon receiving the body and blood of Jesus Christ your faith has made you well.

I pray fervently that our faith will allow us to *avoid* the views that restrict God's presence, God's power, and most of all...avoid the view that sees God's graceful and merciful activity in the extraordinary alone and the thinking that we must somehow live in that realm of extraordinary existence to recognize it or receive it. May our faith open our hearts and minds to recognize the simple gift that allows us to recognize Jesus in a simple piece of bread and sip of wine. May our faith open our hearts and our minds to know that it is the God of all creation who reached into the dust to form us all and breaths the gift of life into us...it is our God, the Father of Jesus Christ who forms us as earthen vessels and pours His extraordinary gift of faith into us all.

The faith we are given is not our entitlement to the miraculous, it is simply a gift that allows us to see the grace and life we are given in Jesus Christ. Jesus is NOT a sideshow miracle worker...He is the Son of God who is with us always...to the end of time.

We are blessed with a faith from God that opens our hearts, our minds, and our eyes to see that through Jesus Christ we broken sinners are made whole and by the miracle of grace we are made a saint in the presence of God. The Son of God has called you and me, to follow and to share with others the Good News of His grace, His forgiveness, and His promise of new life. This call to share the Good News is NOT a miraculous endeavor, it NOT a burden...it does not make us holy and righteous, nor does it make us wise pious theologians. Today, through this Holy Word and in this Holy Meal may we remember that we are blessed with a faith that allows us to trust our Lord God who justifies the ungodly and calls us all to share this Good News.

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<sup>3</sup> Van Harn, Roger E.. The Lectionary Commentary Theological Exegesis for Sunday's Texts, The Third Readings: Gospels. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001. The commentary based on the appointed Gospel reading for the Third Sunday after Pentecost, Year A Matthew 9:9-13, 18-26, page 51-52.

May we then take St. Matthew's words to heart:

<sup>25</sup> At that time Jesus said, 'I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; <sup>26</sup> yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. <sup>27</sup> All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

<sup>28</sup> 'Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup> Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. <sup>30</sup> For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.'

Christ has come to us today and in Word and Sacrament He has fed and nourished our faith...may we go and share this Good News: Jesus Christ has come to call not the righteous but sinners...thanks be to God!

*In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*