

Work and Faith

Matters of Faith: Part 4 “Work and Faith”

Rev. Cameron D St. Michael – November 15th, 2020

24th Sunday After Pentecost

Readings: 1 Samuel 12:19-25; James 2:18-26; Matthew 7:21-27

Reflection: Psalm 28

Greeting: Trust in the Lord and do good. May the Lord give strength to the people! O taste and see that the Lord is good! God is our refuge and strength. Praise the Lord!

Prayer: O Lord our God, you are always more ready to bestow your good gifts on us than we are to seek them, and are willing to give more than we desire or deserve. Help us so to seek that we may truly find, so to ask that we may joyfully receive, so to knock that the door of your mercy may be opened to us; through Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.

Reflection: Psalm 28

Of David. I cry out to you, Lord. You are my rock; don't refuse to hear me. If you won't talk to me, I'll be just like those going down to the pit. Listen to my request for mercy when I cry out to you, when I lift up my hands to your holy inner sanctuary. Don't drag me off with the wicked and those who do evil; the type who talk nice to their friends while evil thoughts are in their hearts! Pay them back for what they've done! Pay them back for their evil deeds! Pay them back for their handiwork! Give back to them exactly what they deserve! Because they have no regard for what the Lord has done, no regard for his handiwork, God will tear them down and never rebuild! Bless the Lord because he has listened to my request for mercy! The Lord is my strength and my shield. My heart trusts him. I was helped, my heart rejoiced, and I thank him with my song. The Lord is his people's strength; he is a fortress of protection for his anointed one. Save your people, God! Bless your possession! Shepherd them and carry them for all time!

(Psalm 28 CEB+)

We read the words of Psalm 28 and hear of God's strength. That God is the solid rock that we stand upon, the one who hears our cries. We seek God to deliver us because we have seen the good work that God has done. We hear the cry that wickedness be ended and for God to lead his people. In what ways do you recognize God's works? In what ways is God your shield? When have you seen God's protection in your life? How can you share that safety with others? How can we all live as a people guided by God's loving hands?

Prayer: God, our faithful protector. We seek your strong hand to shield us. When we have gone astray, you are our shepherd leading us to safety. Grant us the strength of heart we need to trust in all that you do. Help us to always be thankful for the many ways that you watch over us. Grant us the faith we need to continue to follow you. May your steadfast love and generous mercy be with us always and everywhere. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Now let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Sermon:

Our scripture readings for today come from the New Revised Standard Version Bible. Our first reading is from 1 Samuel chapter 12, verses 19 through 25.

All the people said to Samuel, "Pray to the Lord your God for your servants, so that we may not die; for we have added to all our sins the evil of demanding a king for ourselves." And Samuel said to the people, "Do not be afraid; you have done all this evil, yet do not turn aside from following the Lord, but serve the Lord with all your heart; and do not turn aside after useless things that cannot profit or save, for they are useless. For the Lord will not cast away his people, for his great name's sake, because it has pleased the Lord to make you a people for himself. Moreover as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by ceasing to pray for you; and I will instruct you in the good and the right way. Only fear the Lord, and serve him faithfully with all your heart; for consider what great things he has done for you. But if you still do wickedly, you shall be swept away, both you and your king."

(1 Samuel 12:19-25 NRSV)*

Our next reading is from James chapter 2, verses 18 through 26.

But someone will say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith apart from your works, and I by my works will show you my faith. You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder. Do you want to be shown, you senseless person, that faith apart from works is barren? Was not our ancestor Abraham justified by works when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was brought to completion by the works. Thus the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness," and he was called the friend of God. You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. Likewise, was not Rahab the prostitute also justified by works when she welcomed the messengers and sent them out by another road? For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is also dead.

(James 2:18-26 NRSV)*

Our final reading is from Matthew, chapter 7, verses 21 through 27.

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not

prophecy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many deeds of power in your name?' Then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; go away from me, you evildoers.'

"Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell—and great was its fall!" (Matthew 7:21-27 NRSV)*

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

As we move along in our Matters of Faith series, we touch on something that we began last week when we were talking about salvation. This week, we come to the idea of work and faith. Last week we discussed that work alone isn't going to cut it. That you cannot save yourself by your own hands, doing only work for yourself, that it does require faith. However, at the same time, our work has to reflect our faith. We can't just be a people that declares "oh well, Jesus Christ is my Savior, and I'm going to sit here and wait for everything to happen to me." I think the problem is, sometimes we get this idea that works don't matter. We see that in Scripture sometimes when it talks about our works not being enough on their own. We also get some very strong ideas about the importance of doing God's work as a sign of our faith. And I think it's because if we don't show our faith in our works, then our faith is just words, and that if we don't act then we aren't living our faith. It's our works that help to make our faith more than just an idea, but it becomes a life, a way of living.

We see that in our reading from James. James talks about works and faith being very closely intertwined. That believing in God is good. You do well by believing that God is one. He goes on to say that if we don't work, if we don't act on our faith, then what good is our faith? And the example of Abraham is brought up that it was Abraham's works that showed his faith, and that he was called a friend of God because of his faith and because of his works that showed his faith. That a person is justified by works, and not by faith alone. And James ends with the last line for our reading today that, "just as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is also dead." Now it's important that he notes that it's not works that do everything, but it's works that make our faith something more than just words. That it's how we show our faith. We can hear echoes of this in First Samuel. And at first look, this reading might seem out of place. The people seem to have added to their sins because of the work they've been doing to get a king. However, it's what Samuel says to the people. He says, you know though you've done all this evil, don't turn aside from God because even though you've done wrong, you can still serve God. You can still do works for the Lord. That God's not going to ditch his people, that God will be there. However, serving him faithfully is what's going to show that they really are following God. If they want to show that they want to follow the Lord and show that they have repented, then they need to serve the Lord with all their heart.

And we come to our Gospel reading. And I think this really does help to solidify this idea about how works are intertwined with our faith. "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will

enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven.” And it's this idea that you can do all sorts of things in the name of the Lord, but unless those things line up with what God has asked, then those aren't the things you need to be doing. That if we do act on Christ's words, then it's like building a house on a strong foundation. That our acts need to be based in our faith. One of the ways we could think about this simply is that we could do all sorts of things and say it's in the name of God. It's one thing to say that you're dedicating a round of golf to God. It's another to be doing the things he asks us to do. I think about one of the few times that Christ said “here's what I'm going to judge you on” that he said that it was going to be about those who fed the hungry, and clothe the naked and cared for the sick and visited the prisoner was going to be doing the things that showed God's love. And that that was our faith. That we trust in God's will, so we do God's will. That if we trust in Christ, we are going to love the way that Christ taught us to love. That if we are going to have faith in Christ, and believe that he is our Savior. And if we are going to call on the name of Jesus, the name that saves, then we have to do the works that have been set for us.

And I think this is where some of the big issues come in. We often have this separation between faith and works that if we can't work to save ourselves, then it's all about faith. At the same time, we like to say if your works don't show it, then there is no faith. We miss that these two are wound together. Because the thing is that our works, the things that we do, are supposed to reflect our faith. Because in reality everything we do should reflect our faith. Everything that we are should reflect our faith in God. Everything that we are should reflect that we believe that the Holy Spirit is with us that he is right here. Everything we do should reflect that we believe that Jesus Christ is our Savior and is the Savior of the world, and we should act accordingly. Now, it doesn't mean that our actions are the things that are going to completely be our salvation because we need God in our lives to help us to act. We need God to help us to be able to act according to God's will and not for our own selfish desires. That we need Christ there so that we can live a life dedicated to good. We get this balancing act, remembering that it's not our works that bring us to salvation, but it is our works that show that we have accepted it. It's not our works that earn God's grace. It's the works of our hands that show that we have accepted it. That we cannot work and toil until we get God's grace, but we can work and toil to show that we believe in and accept God's grace.

It means doing the work that God's called us to do not just what we think would be fun or what we think is right, but following what Christ taught. That we follow those great commandments: love God and love your neighbor. And Christ gave us all that we need to know about how to love our neighbor. Treat them like you would want to be treated yourself. Treat people how you want to be treated. Treat people how you think God would treat them. Because that's what it's all about really. Our works are how we emulate Christ's love for us. It's how we show the work of the Cross, that we recognize Christ's sacrifice for us. When we take on the suffering of others to alleviate it for the, that when we take on the suffering of others as our own the way that Christ takes on our sin and suffers for us, that we suffer so that others may be free and others may know God's love. That we don't work just for our own ends. We don't work just to further ourselves. But we work to further God. We work to show Christ to others. We recognize that we mess up, and that we are going to terribly mess things up at

times, but our faith is that God is with us. That we have built our foundation on the solid rock, that Christ is the cornerstone. And that as long as we rely on that, we continue to be able to work for God's glory.

So, the reason that this is so central for me is that often we get a disconnect on how our works and our faith intertwine in what it means to have faith. Because, yes, faith is believing in God. Faith is believing that Christ is our salvation. But faith is also living it and showing it. Because we could say all those words over and over again. "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven." I come back to those words because it's important that we act the way we believe. That if we believe that God is love, then we must show love to others so that we can show God to others. If we believe that Christ came to the world so that he may save it, then we must act as if the world deserves to be saved. If we believe God's grace is open to all then we must act as if we believe all can accept God's grace. And so, we must make sure that our actions, and our words, and our beliefs line up. So that it's not simply by our thoughts and it's not simply by our words and it's not simply by our actions, but it is by the life that we live in Christ that we demonstrate our faith in Christ. That we do God's will because we believe that it is right, and it is good. And so, my message is this. Do the work that needs to be done. Do the things that Christ has called us to do. And let us always in our hearts remember that what we do is so that we may show the glory of God, our Father, the love of Christ, the Son, and that we may always walk under the guidance that we may act in the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Prayer of Confession and Pardon: We confess to you, all-knowing God, what we are. We are not the people we like others to think we are. We are afraid to admit, even to ourselves, what lies in the depths of our souls. But we cannot hide our true selves from you. You know us as we are, and yet you love us. Help us not to shrink from self-knowledge. Teach us to respect ourselves for your sake. Give us the courage to put our trust in your guiding power. Raise us out of the paralysis of guilt into the freedom and energy of forgiven people. And for those who through long habit find forgiveness hard to accept, we ask you to break their bondage and set them free; through Jesus Christ our Redeemer. Amen.

Offering: If you are so moved to make an offering, you may send it to the church treasurer, or you may send it to the PO Box listed below. We are still the church, and the church still needs your support to keep doing all the important work that we do.

Lord's Prayer

Dismissal with Blessing: We go forth now in faith and peace. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Until we meet again. **Amen.**

Prayer List

Rev Charliam Renner	Bishop Frank Beard	Our Conference	Our Healthcare Workers
Angie Veach	Diane Washburn	Eric Veach	Cathy Devall
Brock McMorris	Ed & Verna Titus	Hayden Kanizer	Henry Catey
Jake Kiser	Laura Eubank Allison	Nancy Sowers	Cindy Cisney
Patti Corder & Crew	Nancy Hoke	Don Wells	Tricia Adkins
Ronnie & Elaine Carlen	Don Stewart	Anne Winkler Heinrichs	Bill Gilbert
Michael & Makenzie Reynolds		Ronnie Winstead	John Millsap
Family of Jim Croy	Annie McMorris	Dwight Parsons	Family of Sheila Holsapple
Family of Ron Helmink	Trinity Powers	Family of LeRoy Wetzell	Richard Durham
Kathy Hanks	Nora Werner & Family	Wayne Carrell	Gary & Mary Winterrowd
Lois Woolever	Mary White	Nick Nichols	Leo Smith
Bonnie Hite	Greg Williams	Eloise Buffenmeyer	Martha Roberts
Charlie & Charlotte Baxter	Paul Schulte	Kim Hennes	
Residents of the Greenup Nursing Center			

Rev Camron D St. Michael

<https://stmichael.pw>

cdstmichael@outlook.com

(316)530-3182 (call or text)

PO Box 54, Charleston IL, 61920

* Scripture quotations are from New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

+ Scripture quotations are from the Common English Bible, Copyright © 2011 by Common English Bible.

Our Current Series – Matters of Faith

This series looks at different aspects of our faith journey and how we live out our faith in Christ.

October 25th – *Born Again* – What it means to live a new life in Christ.

November 1st – *Journey's End* – A reflection on life to come.

November 8th – *Salvation* – A discussion of how we are saved.

November 15th – *Work and Faith* – The relationship between faith and works.

November 22nd – *Giving Thanks* – Why giving thanks is a faith matter.