

Texts: Galatians 1:13-17, 2:11-21

Subject: Live by Faith

Theme: Living with It

Sixth Sunday of Easter, May 9, 2021; Reformation Lutheran Church, Las Vegas, NV

Grace and peace to you from God our Father in heaven and our Risen Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

What gets you out of bed in the morning (besides, kids, dogs or cats, aches and pains)? Maybe we have to get up and go to work whether we like it or not. I know getting things done, being productive makes me feel good. I'm excited when I have a trip or a place to go, new people to meet, or a family outing. There are things we have to do, routines we follow, and daily chores, but what really gets you excited, motivates you for the day ahead and life in the world? Maybe it's seeing friends, getting outdoors, finding new books, adventures, meeting people, or helping others.

Have you felt disconnected from those things over the past 14 months? So many of us have just been maintaining, trying to get through a day, a week, or a month, to get past current troubles. Sometimes it has felt like we're moving, we're awake, but we're not really living at all.

Authors, psychologists, and sociologists will no doubt have plenty of material to work through in the next decade as we reflect on everything we've been through together. The mental health crisis that existed prior to 2020 has only worsened, and we still have a lot to learn. As we slowly enter into whatever this next phase of existence is, we are facing additional pressures and new issues. It's important to know what motivates us, to have goals, to refocus, and most importantly, to know what we're really living for.

For the man named Saul, it was following the law. He was proud of himself and his adherence to the traditions of his ancestors. He was doing what the Lord required of the people of Israel. He was a Pharisee, and says he was far more zealous than those around him. After his encounter with the risen Lord on the road to Damascus, he was transformed entirely. He became the Apostle Paul, and went all over the known world, to what is now Greece and Turkey. He shared the good news of Jesus, and began worshipping communities in those places. But after he left, others came in and added their perspective. These ones were teaching other ideas, or adding to the Gospel that Paul shared with them.

So Paul writes to the new church in Galatia, and shares of his life before meeting Jesus on the road. He was Jewish his whole life - a descendant of Abraham. To belong to God was his birthright. He was born into it. But then, Jesus showed up. It was a major shift for him, midlife career transition, an extraordinary life change. He didn't ask for it, but now he's *living with it*. He writes to correct them and to share his story and doesn't claim to represent the church in Jerusalem, but to speak directly from his experience with the resurrected Jesus. He is now living not by the law, but by faith alone in Christ. He knows and tells them, only God could have done this, shown up in Jesus Christ, only grace could have done this in him, and only in faith can it be lived from here on out.

We say that we live by faith too. We like to say it, but do we do it? How often do we justify ourselves based on what we have accomplished, or earned, or produced? Much of the time, we'd rather look at our lives - what we have, and even what we feel, what we know, and own these things for ourselves, to imagine that everything we are and possess is on account of our strength and will and work. If we earn a lot of money, we

are proud. If we help someone, we think we ought to reward ourselves. It works in the negative too - If we have a bad day, we blame ourselves. If we are burdened by the weight of our past, that can lead to feelings of guilt or a belief that we are unworthy of God's love, and *living with that* can be an impossible task at times.

So maybe what gets us out of bed in the morning is trying to make up for our failings, trying to do better than the day before to earn some kind of victory over our past misdeeds, or to make ourselves into something better or bigger, or more lovable.

But it just doesn't work. We don't need Jesus to live like that.

I don't know about you, but I need Jesus because I know I can't do it all. I can't control the world around me, and controlling myself is often a work in progress. I don't need another list of tasks to do to earn God's love. I don't need a ladder to climb to get out of the pit I find myself in at times. I need someone who's been there, who can reach down and lift me up, and remind me that no matter what, I am seen, forgiven, known, and unconditionally loved.

Martin Luther writes that, "...if you believe that [Jesus] benefits you and helps you, then you really have it. Then Christ is yours, presented to you as a gift."¹ When you trust that this is true, you have faith. When you believe it, grace is yours. Christ is with you now and always. You are made new. There's nothing else to add to subtract. Faith is trust in the good news that Christ died for you, and is risen again, and that you right now, as you are, are saved, forgiven, and brought back into relationship with God forever.

¹ *Martin Luther. A Brief Instruction on What to Look for and Expect in the Gospels, in the Annotated Luther, Vol. 2, Word and Faith, Kirsi I. Stjerna, ed. (2015, Minneapolis: Fortress Press) 33.*

We have faith. We believe. We are living with it. That means we don't just stay in bed, but can get up in the morning with renewed hope, with mission and purpose, to bring that good news into our lives together. We share it when we hug our mothers, feed our children, help our neighbors, teach students, protect immigrants, purchase groceries, speak out and stand up.

It doesn't matter if we were born with privilege, wealth, power, good looks, or anything else. We are sinners. All of us have fallen short of the mark in our lives, and I'd venture to guess we will continue to do so. But what makes us new is not the work we do.

We are saved by grace through faith. Not for ourselves, but for the sake of the world around us. That's what Paul knew. As someone who claimed their Jewish heritage and identity - Paul and the world around him would have understood obedience to the law as the faithful response to God's grace. For those who followed Jesus, faith in the one who fulfilled the law for eternity is the same:

We trust that God has done what God has promised. God has brought us back from our *selfishness*, our *severing of relationships*, our propensity to *run and hide* from the glory of the Lord, and our *attempts to try to achieve* on our own terms. Our faith is not our work either, but a reflection of the *faith of Christ*, who emptied himself, who has given himself for us and for the world.

Everything we have and everything we are is because of God, who created us, who loves us, forgives us in Christ Jesus and sustains us through the Holy Spirit.

And we have been extraordinarily gifted -

We are graciously *forgiven* - so we forgive others, even when it's hard.

We are *freed in Christ* - to go and love and serve where the Spirit calls us.

We have been given the *Gospel*, the good news of Jesus for the world. Let's share it!

We move forward and live by faith - to serve, to speak, and show God's love, as Christ lives in us.

Christ loved. Christ died. Christ rose and lives in each one of us. So that anything we do that shows that love is the life of Christ in us - we're living with it. And as we go out into the kingdom, the good news of Jesus is proclaimed. You have always been God's reason for getting up in the morning, and by grace, God has given you everything you needed in Jesus Christ. Amen.