



## Grace Lutheran Church

August 7, 2022: 9th Sunday after Pentecost

**“Faith...or Fear?”** [Luke 12:32-40](#)

*Have no fear, little flock; have no fear, little flock, for the Father has chosen to give you the kingdom; have no fear, little flock!*

**Do not fear**, Jesus says. But when the chips are down and you are staring the unthinkable in the face, what would your response be – faith or fear? Of course, faith, we are quick to say. But under what conditions might fear get the better of you?

- When you allow your anxiety or terror in a given situation to choke off any hope you might have had for good outcome.
- When you allow yourself to think that God intended for you to suffer in this way, or that God allowed it to happen – that God could have intervened but didn't.
- Or when you allow the awfulness of what you are experiencing to convince you that God must not exist, at least, the loving, protecting God you thought you always had.

Did you notice the verb I used in each of these? Allow. When you allow.

Fear is a choice we make about how to respond to a situation whose outcome is open, yet to be determined. Choosing fear means giving in to the possibility that things could go badly, even though there is a chance they might not. For example:

- You are being held hostage – you could be rescued.
- Your car has just careened off the road – your seat belt might save you.
- The pilot is making emergency maneuvers – his skill might save the day. .

Faith, on the other hand, is not a choice. It is the default mode of the Christian life. Faith in Jesus Christ is hardwired into our very being as Christians. I have never been in a potentially life-threatening situation like those I just mentioned, but if I ever am – while keeping my wits about me in case I could be helpful in resolving the situation – I hope my basic attitude would be: Well, I have had a good life. I have so much to be thankful for. Here I am, coming to you, Lord, with a heart full of gratitude.

It is easy to identify people of faith. Let's say you have been given two to six months to live. Now, it is a natural impulse to fear death on some level. We prefer life! But if this is the situation that's been handed to you, what's purpose is there in being afraid? A person of faith would not be obsessing about being torn from the green earth and thrown into oblivion. A person of faith would not be clinging desperately to the thin thread of life at all costs and blaming others for things that are beyond anyone's control. Instead they would be reflecting gratefully back on their life, on the blessings they received, on the promise of Christ that they know to be true—the promise that they are deeply loved, infinitely forgiven, and closely held by him for all eternity.

There is a pastor on the ELCA Clergy Facebook page who has been posting regular updates on her journey through cancer. Now she has been given this same time frame – two to six months. From reading her entries, I get the idea that she is not a self-promoter but one who treasures the

connections the Facebook group makes possible. She has been through it all, chemo, radiation, more chemo. Now she shares selfies in which she is seated comfortably in her home, relaxed and smiling. A person of faith would not be absorbed in imagining the terrors of darkness. Instead, they would have questions as I imagine I see in her face that she does: I wonder what it will be like, what will I experience at that moment, will there be a bright light and an incredible feeling of love like people talk about who have been there and come back?

Faith consoles us in the midst of fear. How is faith born and how does it grow? Faith is given at our baptism through the Holy Spirit and grows by God's grace throughout our lives. There is nothing we can do, no work we can plunge into, that will increase our faith. It just happens through the same invisible process of growth that governs the life-forces of creation. All it takes is baptism and the gift of the Holy Spirit to set it in motion.

I combed through the entries on faith in our Lutheran Confessions, and here is some of what I found:

- Faith is not comprehended by human reason. In other words, we can't make sense of it.
- True faith believes we obtain grace and forgiveness through Jesus Christ.
- It is faith that enables us to do good works, because otherwise human nature and human power on their own are much too weak.
- Through faith, because of the gift of the Spirit, hearts are continually renewed.
- Faith comes when we believe Christ's promise that our sins are forgiven.
- Faith is the belief that God truly hears us and cares for us.
- Faith comes when terrified hearts hear the gospel and receive consolation;

Today's Gospel reading reminds us that the life of faith is not a matter of learning to be faithful but simply of coming to know what already is. Faith is opening your heart to the truth that God is madly in love with you just the way you are, the way you were created. Faith accepts that out of that love God has given us God's own Son as one who knows everything about us and promises to be with us at every moment in all seasons of life, as the very image of the God who we could not otherwise come to know.

Faith consoles us in the midst of fear because God's work is already done. The kingdom has already been given to us. In Christ's death and resurrection it has already been accomplished.

This frees us, as Jesus says, to give everything away for the sake of others, and at the same time positions us to spring into action: Do justice. Don't let even a passing opportunity go by to take a stand for that which embraces the values of God's kingdom. Love mercy. Are not we ourselves loved and forgiven by the author of mercy? How then could we do otherwise? And walk humbly with God – never let your own self-importance overshadow the one who made the ultimate sacrifice in humility for us.

Keep your lamps lit, ready to welcome, receive, and participate in every maneuver God is calling from you to affirm that the kingdom is already ours. For even when we feel lost, even when we are riddled with pain, even when hope fails and fear tempts, *especially then* is God is pleased to reveal to you the kingdom of everlasting love, freely and joyfully given.

*Have good cheer, little flock; have good cheer, little flock,  
for the Father will keep you in his love forever; have good cheer, little flock!*