

What Is Your Faith In?

The Fourteenth Sunday after Trinity

September 10, 2023

Luke 17:11–19

What does it mean to have faith in God? There are a lot of people who believe in God. There are many in fact who believe in a lot of gods. Some say all the different religions are reflections of the one God. With all the different religions, we see that there are a lot of people who have faith. But it's not just those who belong to a religion. In fact everyone has faith, even those who believe there is no God. Isn't that faith? Isn't that putting your trust in something you cannot prove? You can't see whether there is a God or not, yet you either believe there is a god or not. Everyone has faith.

And yet we recognize that there is specific faith, don't we? As Christians we believe in the one true God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Our faith is not general, we are rejecting all other beliefs and religions and gods. And we get even more specific than that. We believe that the second person of the trinity, Jesus, who is a man, is the true God. Today's Gospel reading shows us this. When the ten men who had leprosy cried out to Jesus for mercy, He responded by telling them to go and show themselves to the priests. In the Old Testament there were many regulations concerning various forms of uncleanness. When you were to come each week to the house of worship you must be clean. You were to recognize that God is holy and does not allow those who are unclean in His presence.

Leprosy made a person unclean. Those who had leprosy were not allowed to join in in the community. Only when one was healed of this wretched disease could he rejoin the community. But it wasn't enough just to be healed. The person would have to go to the priest so that the priest could declare him clean. This is why Jesus was telling those men to go show themselves to the priests, so that they could be declared clean and be able once again to be part of the community.

It's remarkable though, isn't it, that He didn't heal them first? He told them to go and Luke says that it was when they were on the way that they were cleansed. That is faith! They apparently didn't wonder, "Why are we going to go show ourselves to the priests when we are still diseased." They believed Jesus would heal them and He did. So that is quite some faith.

But one of those men when he saw he was now clean, he couldn't keep going to the priests. He was ecstatic! He turned right back around and went back to Jesus. He was praising God. He bowed down before Jesus and thanked Him profusely. Luke does not say anything about the faith of the other nine men. But he does record the words of Jesus to the one man who returned: "Your faith has saved you."

This then seems to be a different kind of faith! They all believed Jesus would heal them, but now we see that this man had faith in something greater than physical healing. Jesus said to him, "Your faith has saved you." What does it mean to be saved? You can be saved from many different kinds of things. If you are drowning and someone rescues you they have saved you. It's

not eternal salvation but it is being saved. So was Jesus saying that this man's faith saved him in a physical way, that is, healing? Was He saying that this man was saved spiritually, that is, eternally?

The other men had faith and they were cleansed of their leprosy, so it looks like Jesus is talking about something more going on with this man who returned. He had been cleansed, but he also believed that Jesus did something more. He made him whole. The priests could only declare what had already been cleansed. Jesus could actually cleanse and make a person whole.

When this man returned he was praising God with a loud voice. Now that he was in the presence of Jesus he bowed before Him and gave thanks to Him. Did the man praise God and give thanks to Jesus because he saw that Jesus was acting on behalf of God? Or did he in fact realize that this man Jesus, the one who healed him, was in fact God Himself? In the four Gospel accounts we see that no one truly understood who Jesus was until after His death and resurrection. Even so, when that man was praising God and bowing down to Jesus and giving thanks to Him he was actually bowing down to God. He was in fact giving thanks to God. He may not have truly seen Jesus for who He was, God in the flesh, but he was in fact bowing down to the one true God. Jesus was God in the flesh and He made this man whole.

So many people talk about God. So many people want to believe in God. There are many who believe in all kinds of false gods. There are people who wonder if God exists. Some say that they just can't bring themselves to believe in God because of all the horrible things in this life. But we believe. We confess in the Nicene Creed that we believe in the one true God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We believe that God has come in the flesh. The Son of God was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary.

Do not follow along with the world and just believe there is a "God." It's not enough to just have "faith." Bow down before the one, true, almighty Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. He is the true God, begotten of the Father, conceived by the Holy Spirit, and born of the Virgin Mary. In fact, you do. When you approach the altar, you bow. You cannot see Him. Ironically, the man who was standing and bowing before Jesus in the flesh didn't fully realize who He was. Yet you come here, and even though you do not see Jesus, you bow before Him.

You see and taste the bread and wine He gives to you, but you have faith, true faith, because you believe what He says—that you are eating and drinking His very body and blood. You eat the food of His flesh and are made whole. You drink His blood in which He cleanses you of your rotting sinful flesh, the sinful nature in which you were conceived and born. He welcomes you to His table and you bow before Him and praise Him and give Him thanks. As He said to the man He also says to you, "Get up and go. Your faith has saved you." You are cleansed, you are made whole. You will live forever. You still live in this fallen, broken world. But Christ has taken upon Himself in His suffering on the cross all your physical and spiritual infirmities. He cleanses you and makes you whole so that you can truly live. Amen.