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11 o'clock am

Community Church of Issaquah
Issaquah, WA

“And What More Should I Say?”

Hebrews 11:29-12:2

FAITH is the assurance of things hoped for, and the conviction of things not seen.

Go, said Jesus, your FAITH has made you well.

The life I live in the body, I live by FAITH in Christ Jesus.

The righteous will live by FAITH.

For we live by FAITH and not by sight.

By grace you shall be saved through FAITH.

FAITH is how the people passed through the Red Sea as if it were dry land. And FAITH is how the women received their dead back by resurrection.

What more should I say about faith than what all of these Bible passages have said? I feel like I could just read Scripture passages about faith for the next twenty minutes and that would make a pretty good sermon. And yet, since we are surrounded by a great cloud of the faithful, those who have run the race well all the way to the end, lets consider together: what more can we, the Community Church of Issaquah, say about faith?

So what more can we say about faith??

Well, we can say that faith is like gluing yourself to God's ways in the world. It's like a child who wraps herself around her parent's leg, sits on her parent's foot and has that parent schlep her around the room. The child goes where the parent goes. If the parent goes up the stairs, the child goes up the stairs. If the parent goes outside, the child goes outside. Now if you saw this scene unfold who would you say is doing all of the work? The parent! All of the movement and energy and direction come from the parent. The girl is just holding on.

Just holding on is what faith is. Faith is holding on tightly to God's Word. It's the assurance of knowing the Father and the conviction that Jesus is the way, the truth and the life. And then it's holding on for the ride.

But here's the thing about faith. Faith isn't just holding on for holding on sake's. It actually matters what you're holding on TO. What if that little child looked up and the leg she was holding onto wasn't actually her parent's, but was a stranger's?! Well that stranger could be taking her wherever! That stranger could be leading her out of the house and into the dangerous street! Holding on to the wrong person can get you in a lot of trouble. Clinging to something or

someone who is not the God we know in Jesus Christ is a dangerous proposition. Because they can take you wherever they want to and it's not necessarily good. Holding on is faith, but if it's not Jesus you're holding on to, it's faith in something false.

In the United States have a strange form of faith in false things. See American faith is often faith in faith itself. It's like we've been children who have been instructed to "hold on tight to our parent's leg," but we stopped listening after the hold on part. So we sit there squeezing our arms together real tight and wrapping our legs around themselves. And we think just the fact of imitating holding on will ensure everything will turn out okay.

This is what we do in the U.S. We think that if we just have faith—not have faith in something, not have faith in God, but have faith in faith—everything will turn out okay. Having faith in faith itself says things like: Think positively! Believe in progress! Have faith! And yet never once are we told *why* we should have confidence in faith itself.

See here's the thing. Christians have more to say than just "faith." We are saved *through* faith. But we are saved **BY** grace. It is by **grace** you have been saved, through faith. We are not saved *by* our faith. We are saved *by* grace. Grace is the fact that when we cling onto God, God actually does bring us through. Grace is the fact that God is a living God who can be depended upon.

Hebrews says that by faith, Gideon, Barak, David and Samuel conquered kingdoms, administered justice, obtained promises and shut the mouth of lions. But Hebrews **ALSO** says that others suffered mocking and floggings and others were stoned to death and killed by the sword. Now if those martyrs had just had our American faith in "faith" they would look pretty foolish wouldn't they? They died. Their lives didn't end in getting that promotion or becoming an Olympic runner or getting a Nobel prize. If the martyrs were just "thinking positively," what a failure.

But we aren't saved by just faith. We are saved by **GRACE**. And grace, God's one-sided for-us action, is our salvation. Because we have faith in **GOD**, we don't have to try to secure the results. Because this whole business of living is from God and for God and finds its moment by moment being in God, we can release trying to drum up positive emotions and we can begin to cling to the hope of resurrection, Jesus, God's own Son.

Now maybe you might think that clinging isn't exactly the healthiest relationship habit—and it usually isn't. But the thing about clinging to God is that we were made to cling to God. We are the Creation. And God is the one and only Creator. We were designed to depend upon God for our very existence. There's no shame in clinging to the one we are meant to cling to. Just read the Psalms.

God wants us to cling to him. God wants us to cry out to him. God wants us to have faith in him. If you think of it like the child riding around on her parent's foot, God enjoys giving rides! Most parents tire out of having their child latched onto their leg. I think my dad would last a whole ten seconds before telling me the ride was over growing up. But God wants us to wrap our arms around him. God doesn't want us to be taken for a ride with someone who's not our Father. And God doesn't want us just to wrap our arms around ourselves and squeeze our eyes shut and just think, "If I just have faith, if I just have faith." God wants us to reach out for the one who created us.

Now what more should I say to all of this? What more should I say to the good news that God wants us to cling to him?

Well, let me tell you of my own faith. Let me join with that great cloud of witnesses and tell you how I have been saved by grace through faith.

See, grace by faith, gluing myself to God, is why I'm up here today in front of you all. You want to know what one of the hardest things in the world is for me? Writing. Putting words down on a piece of paper.

In seminary, I'd describe it like birthing a baby. It's not some fun kind of flow where the words just run from the pen. It's more like excruciating pushing for hours on end.

For a long time I didn't know how I was going to do this thing that God called me to. God had called me to be a pastor, and yet I felt like the prophet Jeremiah who when the word of the LORD comes to him says, "Ah, LORD God, I really am not lying when I say do not know how to speak!"

That white page of Microsoft Word would open up on my computer screen and my mind would suddenly go...blank. It was like there was no words. Just nothing to say. Don't have anything to say this week.

But God during that time taught me faith. When I felt like that sermon was never going to be born. When I felt like I was going to stand up in front of a congregation and have to say, "Well, the Word of the Lord didn't come to me this week," I would turn myself over to God. I would say, God this is YOUR work, and I would cling to the LORD.

And you know what, I have always had a sermon to preach on Sunday morning.

God would always come through. In my weakness, God was strong. That is faith and grace. Faith is the turning yourself over to God—the gluing yourself to the LORD and depending on him to come through. Grace is the fact that God does come through. Time and time again, God does come through!

So what is your story of faith and grace? What more should you say? What is your

word to add to the great cloud of witnesses?

Because we have so many stories of God's faithfulness to us. The other day someone told me about when our church wanted to host Tent City 4 here in Issaquah—and all of the other cities had been rejecting the encampment. And our pastor went down to the mayor's office—and talked with the mayor—and we became one of the very first to host Tent City. And then city after city started allowing the tent encampments to stay for periods of time. We had faith that God could do more than we could ask or imagine and God DID.

Right now is another time for us to have faith. We're searching for our next pastor. There are a lot of unknowns. Now is the time when we need to grab onto God and hang on for the ride. God will take us where we need to go if we're only willing to be taken there. God will provide. Grace goes before us. We can be confident and we can be assured because we know that God is with us.

You know there's a little known side benefit to faith: It's JOY. A life of faith is a joyful life. I want all of you to live lives of faith because I want all of you to experience the joy that comes when you see God act. Faith opens yourself to God acting. Faith is the ability to see God's grace. And grace, well grace—unexpected and undeserved—is the fount of joy. It's the joy of realizing I'm not in this life alone. It's the joy of the assurance

that you don't have to have every detail under control to get through the day. It's the joy of knowing the Lord as the One who sees us, call us by name and is FAITHFUL.

There is no exhausting joy because there is no exhausting faith! And there is no exhausting faith because there is no exhausting God!

What more should we say? Faith. Grace. Joy. What more should we say? Our God is a living God.

What more should we say? The righteous shall live by faith.