

## Foundations of Our Faith: Faith

You can't make this stuff up. The best sermon illustrations are the ones that you just cannot make up. I was trying to find the perfect set up for this sermon yesterday so I turned to my Facebook feed. And there it was, my sermon introduction.



A fun and fun-loving friend and servant of Jesus, posts on her feed: "It's hard being the most innocent one out of all your friends." Which was met with many hilarious comments from her friends, all of whom seemed to share the sentiment of this comment: "You just keep telling yourself that but we still won't believe it."

Why didn't this person's friends believe her words? Because they know that while this person is a kind, generous and good soul, a child of God, she is not the 'most innocent' among them.

Whether you believe what someone says or promises depends on whether the statement matches your knowledge of the speaker. From what you know about the speaker of a statement, especially of a promise, do the words ring true? Can you put your faith in the words?

You probably know the Milwaukee Brewers player, Christian Yelich. He is a really good baseball player, or he was until last year. As he prepares for another season who will he turn to in an effort to find his magic, MVP-worthy swing? Listen to his remarks, quoted in a newspaper article about his relationship with the Brewers hitting coach Andy Haines:

“I’ve known him for, what, probably 12 years now; he’s known me since I was 18 years old. I’ve known him for so long and know him so well that we’re in contact a lot. I’m able to talk to him, and I trust him.”

There it is: he trusts him. He goes to him for counsel and advice about how to return to his peak form because he knows his coach so well that he can trust his words. In short, he has faith in his coach to help him find his way back.

What is necessary for you to put your faith in someone to the point where you believe what they tell you, to trust them with your future? What is faith?

What do we mean when we say faith? Well, in the first use of the word we mean that set of principles which are known as Christianity, or the Christian faith, as opposed to, say, Judaism or Islam.

Today though we have a second use of the word ‘faith’. In this case it refers to the word as used in the Bible to express the belief in God as revealed in

scripture. So, we are talking about the faith of individuals in God and Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior which justifies us, which reconciles us with God.

One of the foundational ideas of the Christian religion is that we become a part of the family of God not by works we do but by our faith in Jesus Christ's death and resurrection as the one and only effective means by which we gain eternal life.



**SLIDE: Romans 4:16**

The Bible compares our faith to believing a promise from God. That is why Paul uses Abraham as his illustration. Abraham is referred to as 'Father Abraham', meaning he is the spiritual father of all who believe in God, who have faith that God will do what God says he will do when he makes a promise.

**SLIDE: Romans 4:17a**

Abraham was very, very old, too be able to father a son. (As a side note, I have been admonished by one of our older saints to stop calling myself 'old' because then I will start acting old. That seems like sound advice from someone in their 90's. So, I am not claiming the status of 'late middle age' until I get to my 80's, although I do not expect to father any more children, dear.)

Anyway, back to Father Abraham. Abraham was promised that he, being old, and his wife Sarah, who was also old and way past childbearing years, that they would be blessed with a son. Not only that, that he would be the father of nations, his seed multiplying until the numbers were not countable, like the innumerable stars in the sky or grains of sand on the beach.

Abraham had no physical evidence to back up his belief in God's promise. From all he knew of his and Sarah's bodies and biology, it just couldn't happen. Yet he believed that God would do as he promised. This is what the Bible calls 'faith': ***believing the promises of God even when the promise seems impossible within the facts of life as we know them. (4:17b)***

So why did Abraham have faith God's promise to do the impossible, to open a dead womb and give it new life? John Stott captures the essence in these words: "Faith is believing or trusting a person, and its reasonableness depends on the reliability of the person being trusted. "...(F)aitth is not burying our heads in the sand, or screwing ourselves up to believe what we know is not true, or even whistling in the dark to keep our spirits up. On the contrary, faith is a reasoning trust."

Abraham knew God to have two characteristics that did not change: God was first powerful enough to do anything. Second, God will do what God says God will do. God is reliable; God is faithful. 'Great is thy faithfulness, Lord unto me.'



How did Abraham know this about God? He walked with God on a long journey. He talked with God at every step of his journey. He learned that God was with him always, providing for him always, caring for him always. Based on the experiences of his life journey, Abraham believed God's promise to do the impossible. That is the faith which made him righteous, or right with God.

**SLIDE: 4:18**

Abraham's faith allowed him to 'hope against hope', to believe the impossible, that he would in fact become what God promised, the father of nations.

**SLIDE: 4:21-22**

And this is the most important thing to see: because Abraham believed, had faith in God's promise, Abraham was deemed righteous in the eyes of God. It was his faith, not his obedience to the law, which made him right with God, and being right with God he received the blessings of life from God.

**SLIDE: 4:24**

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And that, my friends, is what connects Abraham's story to you and me and the billions of people born after Abraham. We are included in the promise made to Abraham. We who believe God's promises are also made right with God not by what we do, not by obeying a set of rules or laws, but by our belief in God's promise, our faith in God's promise given in the resurrection of Jesus.



**SLIDE: 4:25**

These words capture the whole of scripture's good news. Believe this promise and live forever!

God promises to bring life from death and that God would make that which was not into that which is. God is the author of and creator of life, and he promises that new life in a new earth and new heaven to all who have faith in the promise.

How can we trust God to do what he promises? Here is where the Resurrection of Christ becomes essential, foundational to our Christian faith. We have the testimony of eyewitnesses as recorded in the Bible to the fact that Jesus was truly dead and that he truly rose and ascended. We know God is powerful

enough to bring life to a dead human body if we believe the testimony of Scripture.

But we also know God as the Creator. The sky and sea, the springing forth to life of the creation which surrounds us, this is evidence that God is faithful to create new mercies. 'Morning by morning new mercies I see.'



So, if God can spring life from barren wombs, if God can bring life to that which appears dead because there is always a stirring beneath the surface which we cannot see, then we can trust that God will spring forth life from tombs.

If God has power over wombs, then God has power over tombs.

This is the object of our faith, that by grace God makes the dead alive, God creates something from nothing. This is **true faith**.

*True faith is not only a sure knowledge by which I hold as true all that God has revealed to us in Scripture; it is also a wholehearted trust, which the Holy Spirit creates in me by the gospel, that God has freely granted, not only to others but to me also, forgiveness of sins, eternal righteousness, and salvation. These are gifts of sheer grace, granted solely by Christ's merit. (Heidelberg Catechism Answer 21)*

**Big Idea:** Faith is believing God's promise that God will raise all who believe to new life 'solely by Christ's merit.'

As we continue our journey through Lent toward Easter morning commit yourself to getting to know God well enough that you can trust his promise of life to you. Talk to God in prayer. Listen to God as you study his Word. Watch God at work in nature and in your service.



In this way you will come to know God well enough that you can judge the validity of what God promises. Just like the Facebook friends knew their friends well enough to know that her post about being ‘most innocent’ was meant as a joke (or at least I hope it was); just like Yelich knows his coach well enough to trust him to get him back in his swing groove; just like Abraham knew God well enough to trust him to create life out of a dead womb; you can trust God’s promise to raise you as God raised Christ, raising you up to eternal life today and forever.

AMEN