

Sixteenth Sunday after Trinity
09/15/2013
Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church
Ephesians 3:(7-12) 13-21
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Grace, mercy and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Word of God for our consideration this morning is from Saint Paul's Letter to the Ephesians the 3rd chapter.

In today's readings of God's Word you have the widow of Zarephath, the widow of Nain and Paul who is sitting in prison. The Old Testament widow has lost her son, seems to be a young son. In the Gospel the widow of Nain seems to have lost an older son. In the Epistle St. Paul has lost his freedom. He is in prison and is looking at death face to face for the crime of preaching Christ and Him crucified. We'll consider Paul and his plight first and then say something of the two widows and the faith that sustained them all.

The reading for this morning starts at verse 13 of chapter 3: *"So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory. For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from Whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of His glory He may grant you to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God."*

Paul is addressing his comments to Gentiles. He's speaking to those who are abnormally born, sort of like he was. Paul originally persecuted the Christian

Church to the point of murdering Christians. He persecuted Christ. Despite this Christ chose Paul. He chose him to be His witness to the world, particularly the Gentile or non-Jewish world. That's what Paul is doing here. He is writing this Word of God to the Gentiles in Ephesus who have come to know Jesus as Lord and Savior.

He urges them not to fall away from the faith for the trial he is undergoing. He doesn't want them to 'lose heart'. He doesn't want them to succumb to the temptation to fall away during this trial that has befallen him and of which they could very possibly later be subject to as well. His encouragement is very reminiscent of his proclamation in the 1st chapter of Romans. *"For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The one who by faith is righteous shall live.""*

In his letter to the Romans Paul wants the people to know that even though Jesus died a criminal's death it wasn't a shameful thing. He isn't ashamed that Christ Jesus died on the cross for him. Paul knew that no matter how bad Jesus' death looked, no matter the circumstances surrounding it, that death, the death of Jesus was Paul's salvation. He said it was the power of God for salvation. The proclamation of that death, that Gospel, was what saved people and for that Paul would not be ashamed. The end of that passage reads, *"The one who by faith is righteous shall live."* But if you look at your English Standard version Bible that's not what you would have before you. The ESV has

chosen to translate that verse as “*The righteous shall live by faith.*” “*The righteous shall live by faith*” versus “*The one who by faith is righteous shall live.*” Doesn’t sound like much difference but emphasis is important and it’s especially important when it come to Scripture. The ESV put the emphasis on the person being righteous and then talks about living by faith. It could be understood that their righteousness created and maintains the faith. But the preferred reading puts the emphasis on the faith given. “*The one who by faith is righteous shall live.*” All the difference in the world. In this translation it’s clear that righteousness is from the faith. And faith is a gift from God, as Paul makes clear in chapter 2 of Ephesians. The emphasis is on God and His work among and in us. It’s He who makes us righteousness through faith.

But what faith? Our faith? Do we, when we hear the Word, gin up faith within our own hearts? If we back up just a tad from today’s epistle and include verses 7-12 we get an answer to that. “*Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God’s grace, which was given me by the working of his power. To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things, so that through the Church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in Him.*”

At the first of this section Paul says that he was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace. Certainly that is correct. God caused Paul to believe. God through the gift of His Holy Spirit through the Word caused Paul to stop murdering Christians and become one himself. But then the ESV muddles up this section when at the end it says, "*This was according to the eternal purpose that He has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in Him.*" Our faith in Him. Again this may sound minor but stay with me. If you look at the Greek it doesn't say "Our faith in Him". Instead Scripture says, "*through the faith of Him.*" In other words the 2 verses should read, "*This was according to the eternal purpose that He has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through the faith of Him*" or if you prefer "*through His faith.*"

Again it's emphasis although here it's just a bad translation. We have boldness and access with confidence to God only through the faith of Christ. Only through His life, death, and resurrection do we get to be in fellowship with God. Without Christ and His faith God is our enemy and judge not our Father and Savior.

So Paul says, "Don't lose faith or be ashamed because I'm in prison." Rather stand in the faith of Christ and "*according to the riches of His glory He may grant you to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love*

of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.”

That Word is to you as well. It's to you who read the headlines from the local and national news and are scared about this world you live in. Does it not seem that chaos and evil reign? It's to you who see you own failings when you judge yourself against the 10 commandments and see that you don't measure up to God's will. Your sins are a combination of those so common no one thinks about them and those so hideous that no one would ever want them revealed. Paul's words here are for you who've lost loved ones and are desperate to find relief from your mourning but none seems to come. The words are for you who're dealing with sickness and anxiety as troubles seem to mount.

Don't lose heart! The widow of Zarephath lost her only son. Her first thought was that God had done this to her because she sinned. He was punishing her for her wrong doings by killing her son. This is the same woman God had blessed with an unending supply of flour and oil in last week's OT reading. The God who'd blessed her so, now took even more from her. Yet when the man of God cried out in appeal to the Father, God raised the widow's son. Instead of punishing her God used her and her son to glorify Himself and to give her faith.

No doubt the same is true for the widow of Nain. Her older and only son died leaving her alone and vulnerable. She grieved his death and Jesus had compassion on her. She too probably felt more than a tinge of guilt. She too no doubt asked, "Why"? Yet Jesus Christ, the Word of God, spoke in faith and her

son lived. Her son was restored to her in the midst of her grief and grief was gone just like that. The Lord of life intervened.

And Jesus' last apostle sits in prison and he tells those he'd ministered to not to lose heart. Instead Paul praises God for bringing faith to the Ephesians. The widow of the Old Testament would tell you, the widow from the New Testament would tell you and Paul would tell you no matter what obstacles are in your way "*Do not lose heart*". The God who in Christ has forgiven your sins, the God who in Christ gives you eternal life will not allow you to perish. There's no promise of ease of life or healing of diseases or raising of your dead loved ones. But there is a promise that He who created faith in you, who gave you the merits of His faith, will give you eternal life. There's a promise that all things on this earth work for the good of those who love (that is have the faith of) Jesus Christ.

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God is in control. Your salvation depends on what God does and not on you. Hear His Word. Repent of your sins. Receive the forgiveness and faith God gives you in Christ. And by His power and will do not lose heart. "*Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to Him be glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.*"

The Lord Jesus be with all the saints. Amen.