



Faith is not that human illusion and dream that some people think it is. Faith is a work of God in us, which changes us and brings us to birth anew from God (cf. John 1). It kills the old Adam, makes us completely different people in heart, mind, senses, and all our powers, and brings the Holy Spirit with it.

–Martin Luther–

Commentary on Romans

PROCLAMATION POINTS

The following are some thoughts and questions to be used for a text study on the weekly lessons, or for jump-starting the imagination of the preacher and hearer in preparing for the proclamation event.

Genesis 12:1-9

God called and Abram went. There was no discussion. There were no questions about where the journey might take him. There wasn't even a question about who was calling him. God spoke his Word to Abram, and that Word took root, bringing him to faith. God's promises to Abram moved him to action. Abram left everything behind to go on a journey to an unidentified land. God's promise moved him to abandon the known in exchange for the unknown. It makes sense that Abram was recognized by Paul as the model of what faith looks like (Romans 4:3).

- *Do you think God chose Abram because of his faithfulness or that God's choosing created Abram's faith? What difference does it make?*
- *What is it about God's Word that would move Abram to do such radical things? What is God's Word moving you to do?*

Psalms 121

A key aspect of faith is that it centers on what is not seen (Hebrews 11:1, 2 Corinthians 4:18). In this Psalm we see faith that trusts in God's unending presence, even in the face of difficulty. The Psalmist knows that his help comes from the Lord, even when he is surrounded by threats.

- *What kind of effect does adversity have on faith? How have you experienced this in your own life of faith?*
- *What makes the promises of God life-giving in the midst of distress? What makes them hard to believe?*

Romans 4:1-8, 13-17

In our relationships with one another, we are often keeping score, keeping track of what we are owed or what we owe. Whether it's keeping track of whose turn it is to take out the garbage or keeping track of how many times someone has hurt us, the tendency is there in all of us. We want to know where we stand in relation to those around us. Do we owe? Or are we owed?

We often assume that our relationship with God is also based on transactions. We figure that God is keeping track of everything we do, and our job is to offset the marks against us with acts of faith and righteousness. But here in Romans, Paul reminds us that the right relationship with God is the relationship of faith, trusting in God's promises which bring us grace.

- *If our righteousness comes through faith, what is the purpose*

of the law?

- *How does trusting in our ability to obey the law make the gospel null and void?*

Paul describes God as calling into existence the things that do not exist. Faith is one of those things that does not exist apart from God's calling it into existence. Apart from God's Word and God's Spirit, true faith, saving faith, cannot be. But God's Word brings faith into being, even in the likes of sinners like Paul and you and me.

- *How are we tempted to take credit our faithfulness?*
- *How is the way we witness and evangelize shaped by our understanding of faith as a gift?*

John 3:1-17

Nicodemus came by night to visit Jesus. He wanted to know what Jesus had to say, but he didn't want to be seen talking with him or listening to him. Nicodemus was in the dark, and even after listening to Jesus he still didn't understand what Jesus was talking about. Nicodemus was hiding in the shadows, unable to comprehend the light in front of him.

- *How does Nicodemus' decision to visit Jesus at night symbolize our human bondage to sin?*
- *In what ways does Nicodemus' coming at night reflect our desire to have control over how God's Word comes to us? How is this desire a stumbling block to faith?*

In verse 3 Jesus tells Nicodemus he must be born anwqen (another, pronounced *ah-know-thin*). This phrase is rightly understood as both "born from above," and "born again, born anew." Most English translations choose one of these meanings, footnoting the other. Overemphasizing one understanding at the expense of the other leads to missing this double meaning. There is both a time (again) and a place (from above) for the birth Jesus is speaking about.

- *What associations do you have with being "born again"? What associations do you have with being "born from above"?*

John 3:16 is one of the most beloved verses in Scripture, but verse 17 is equally stunning in its beauty and simplicity. God didn't come into the world to condemn, but to save. The work Jesus came into the world to do is for the sake of humankind. It is to save this world that is lost in sin.

- *How might these final verses lead us into universalism? Is that a problem?*
- *How does God impact our lives with the reality of salvation?*