

## **FAITH RECEIVES GOD'S PROMISES**

Hear again the Word of God, from that which appears to be the second of only two sentences contained in this day's reading from the Letter to the Corinthians:

*From [God] all of you remain in Christ Jesus, Who became Wisdom for us from God – righteousness certainly, and holiness, and redemption – that, as it was written, “The one continually boasting, in (the) Lord he must continue to boast.”<sup>1</sup>*

**Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ**

For years, the saints whom God gathers here to receive His gifts of forgiveness, salvation and eternal life have continued to hear that His entire revealed Word stands as a unified whole. We have heard proclamations that declare when an Old Covenant text foreshadows a New Covenant completion. We have audibly traced New Testament ties to Old Testament prophecies. We have learned to listen intently for themes which bind together all of each day's readings.

Today such a cord is heard as the readings are bound together to declare that faith receives God's promises. This day's readings began with the vision of righteous multitudes singing Alleluia (Praise YH). Theirs is faith's response to God's grace. That was given into our ears and out of your mouths by God through the assembled texts of the Introit. Then, God, through Isaiah, declared that His promised Servant would be the One called in righteousness, to bring the Faith which binds in the light of truth people from all nations. Through the Gospel reading, Jesus proclaimed that John's washing Him in the waters into which people's sins had been flowing was fitting to fulfill all righteousness. By Faith, He took on our sins, and the sins of the whole world. In Faith, through our baptisms, He washes them from us. In the Faith given with the water and the Word, we receive God's promises. Then, in the Epistle (Apostolic Letter), the Church hears that Christ Jesus is her, our, *rightness [with God]* in Jesus' resurrection; *and* our *“holification,”* in our daily turning from sin and receiving His forgiveness; *and* our having been *bought back from sin, death, and hell* through Christ's passion and death in our sins.

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:30-31.

The Faith in us joyfully receives those truths as God's promises which continue to be fulfilled for us in Christ Jesus.

Over the years, we, as one, have experienced increasing times of happiness and celebration that come from the joy of knowing that God has placed all our sins on Jesus. We are moved in Faith to believe that God, in Jesus, continues to declare each and all of us right with Himself. To accomplish His will among us, God has continued to unite us as one Body in Christ by the public preaching of His rightly divided Word. He has even done so in the times when we individually, or in factions, willed to be divided.

Recently, the movement of the Holy Spirit among us led us to publicly confess that the center of this congregation's mission is the truth that *we preach, teach, and confess Christ Crucified for the forgiveness of our sins*. Through that, the Holy Spirit continues to guide us toward *Building a Legacy in Christ-crucified*. We have not always been found this united in confession. Even so, God through His Word, was faithful in continuing to call us back to Christ as our center, that, repeatedly, we might know and believe that faith receives God's promises in our midst.

Congregational responses centered upon Christ-crucified are genuine boasting in the Lord. Such statements continue to reflect much more of God's divine work in our midst, and in our community, than will any physical building which God will raise up on this property. We are called to remember that our theme sentence for the day continues to declare of God's Church:

*From [God] all of you remain in Christ Jesus, Who became Wisdom for us from God – righteousness certainly, and holiness, and redemption – that, as it was written, "The one continually boasting, in (the) Lord he must continue to boast."*<sup>2</sup>

Here is a boast: all that we are doing here through the hearing and receiving of the Word of God is truly worked in and among us by the Wisdom of God. He is the Christ Jesus of the Scriptures Whom we continue to proclaim. Through His Word, God has been building us up upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets.

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<sup>2</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:30-31.

That reality has led visiting pastor/teachers, Christian educators and missionaries to joyfully wonder at your knowledge and love of God's Word. I have heard repeatedly over the years that such teachers of the Faith have never, or rarely, received God's gifts in the midst of a congregation whose various members have so much biblical literacy and understanding as that found among us. For them, hearing and studying God's Word with you may be expressed as the felt like they were going to the Well of the Water of Life.

Where the Word is heard in its purity, where the Sacraments are administered rightly, there people truly behold that God gives the Faith which receives His promises. Through His audible and visible Word, He fulfills His promises among His people, in you, and good works flow from this place. The most recent evidence we have of that could be seen in yesterday's work among military veterans. That was done in partnership with members (confirmation youth) from Faith Lutheran Church, Tucson; comfort dogs (Zoey) from Concordia University Wisconsin, and (Titus) from Trinity Lutheran Church, Prescott Valley along with their handlers. (Many of you will hear about their work from David and Dottie later today).<sup>3</sup>

All that is good that happens among, through and out of us (Diaconate, Elders, LCMSU at U of A, LWML, Not-Just-Quilting, Operation Barnabas, and so on) flows forth because we have a gracious God. He comes to us continually. He brings His gifts of forgiveness – regular weekly opportunities to confess our sins and receive His blood-bought forgiveness. He repeatedly pours His Word into our ears, that our hearts, lips and lives may reflect His glory on earth (and be witnessed by the heavenly hosts). He feeds us with heavenly manna – the very Body and Blood of our Savior – that we might be forgiven and strengthened into eternal life. He gives us His Word, He keeps us in His Word and He moves us to do good works out of the hearing and receiving of His Word. Even so, when we are honest with ourselves, we can hear this assembly of sinner/saints

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<sup>3</sup> Internet. [www.lutheranchurchcharities.org](http://www.lutheranchurchcharities.org), accessed January 9, 2016.

described as were those gathered by God into the ancient Church in Corinth. Hear another translation of the first, long (so bear with the reading) sentence from today's section of the Letter to the Corinthians:

*All of you continue to consider your calling, O brothers, because not many (of you were) wise according to (the) flesh, not many (were) powerful, not many (were) of noble birth; but the moronic things of the cosmos God selected for Himself, that He might continue to put to shame the wise, and the weak of the cosmos God selected for Himself, that He might continue to put to shame the strong, and the low-born of the cosmos, also the things having been despised, God selected for Himself the things which are not, that the things being may be made inactive, so not may all flesh boast before God.<sup>4</sup>*

Today we truly stand on the shoulders of giants of the Faith. Yet, St. Paul did not call them giants. He reminded them that most of them were common, average everyday people.

That does not mean that none of that congregation were wise, powerful and of noble birth. The reality was that not everyone there was from the same calling in life. That moved St. Paul to later record in this letter, and the other one received by the Church, that such distinctions caused divisions among them. Though it does not show up in the encouraging words we are hearing from today, the truth is that congregation was really conflicted. It seems to have taken, from the internal witness of the two Letters to the Corinthians we have, four epistles from St. Paul to turn them from their internal divisiveness. Compare that to the one letter which was all it took to turn the congregations in Galatia from wanting to follow the Law for salvation to remembering that it is faith alone that receives God's promises. (Just so we don't forget our history: God sent two pastors and moved them to work together that the divisions that repeatedly tore this congregation apart would cease. Now he has joined another (pastor) to the one (who won't leave) to continue that work. He has done so that we as a congregation might remain in and grow stronger in the Faith which receives God's promises).

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<sup>4</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:26-29.

Return your thoughts to today's first sentence, as we break it down and consider it in light of that which God is doing among us. The Holy Spirit calls to the Church, then and now, *all of you continue to consider your calling, O brothers...* In a manner which appears to be used in a majority of the appeals to faith in the New Testament Letters, the Apostle address God's people first as brothers – indicating one Father (God) and one Mother (the Church) – and then, “all of you.” His appeal made that they may find unity in the faith by calling all the individuals in the congregation to examine themselves as to the manner and means by which they have been assembled. Please answer this question once posed, and with difficulty and a lot of guidance, was eventually answered by the leadership of a conflicted 21<sup>st</sup> century LCMS congregation: “Where may you behold yourselves most united in the Faith?”

The answer of unity which is desired is: in the Lord's Services, or, at the Lord's Altar Table. That is what the congregation long ago was failing to understand and needed letters of correction from a man taught directly by Jesus after the Christ's death, resurrection and ascension. It was the lack of unity in the Lord's Services, especially at His Table, which has been learned through careful pastoral study and observation, that did divide this congregation from time-to-time in years past. It is a lack of treasuring the unity of the Faith God gives to those who in the Faith receive His rightly divided Word of grace which could divide us again. It is God's will that not happen among us, as it was His will for the Church in Corinth long ago. To that end, the Holy Spirit continues to declare about His congregations then and now: *not many (of you were) wise according to (the) flesh, not many (were) powerful, not many (were) of noble birth...*

Consider your calling in life. Not many of our number have advanced college or university degrees. Nor do any of you seem to excel at getting away with breaking with those Second Table commandments. (Those bound by the sinful flesh can become quite adept, for a time, at dishonoring authorities; at murder (or unrepentant killing of bad drivers in your heart); at adultery (or not turning from thoughts of cheating); of stealing;

of continual bearing false witness (even unabashed gossip); of coveting to trick others out of that which God has given them and so on).

None of us as individuals are world leaders today. A few were or are local, regional and national captains of industry, science, education and Church organizations. Not many of us are of noble birth (we are Americans after all, who eschew such titles); though some of the students of genealogy among us might have found some royal ties. (Just a thought, all Christians have been giving royal honors. Our Head is King of kings, and Lord of lords. We are called by God His kingdom Priests, and elsewhere in Scripture, little “g,” gods).

From that St. Paul goes on to say that God elected for Himself the foolish things of the fallen creation. That is a key to the Faith—God does the selecting of those whom He will gather together in the Faith. He goes on to give His rationale for such election to unity in the Faith, in Christ, in forgiveness and life everlasting. Our text declares that it is God’s will to put down those who think they can by their own wisdom, power, genealogy or exalted human status reason, or win, or inherit, or place themselves into His good grace and favor. God wills to show in electing the opposite of human consideration to bring all people to humility and repentance that they too may be saved.

The Word continues, *God selected for Himself the things which are not, that the things being may be made inactive....* In ancient times, that phrase contained a great insult. Long ago, people believed their gods to had “being.” To be “the things which are not,” to have “unbeing” was considered to be counted among the lowest of all creatures. Christians’ critics in the first three centuries AD viewed them as “unbeings.” As you heard most of them had no social, worldly or cosmic standing. Like those critical of you Christians today, those who despised them could not understand how any God would not simply choose the best and ignore the rest.

Even so, God reveals His mystery in choosing the likes of you to receive His promises by faith. He elected you by grace and not by your wisdom, power or parental lineage. He does so, as the Scripture declares *so (that) all flesh may not boast before God.*

God, through His grace, gives the Faith. The Faith receives the Christ. The Faith believes the Christ. The Faith lives in Christ. The Faith gives us all Christ's righteousness and unites us in Him.

**The peace which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus**

The Baptism of Jesus (*LSB One-year series*)  
Antiphon (Isa. 6:1b; Ps 100:1b-2a; Rev. 19:6); Isaiah 42:1-7; I Corinthians 1:26-31; Matthew 3:13-17  
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*Paster Michael A. Merchuse*  
***Soli Deo Gloria***