

Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church



Weekly Sermon Series

Our Faith

What is faith? What is our faith? One definition says that faith is “belief that does not rest on logical proof or material evidence.” So we may have faith in Santa Claus or the Easter Bunny. Another definition says faith is a “trust in God and in God’s actions and promises.” What comes to your mind as a definition of faith? We may observe that a person has “a strong faith” or “an unquestioning faith” or “a confidence in God.” Usually such comments are positive and affirming. Do you consider faith to be positive or negative?

What we have difficulty with today is how the value of faith is deeply challenged in Scripture. For example, I Corinthians 13:2 says “and if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.” Wow! Take a deep breath. Faith, even the greatest example of faith alone, leaves us empty. Another passage, James 2:14, also makes the point that faith alone may be worthless. “If you have faith but do not have works, can faith save you?” James asks. His answer is no. Faith without good works is dead. If you have living faith and you see someone hungry, you feed them. If you don’t, your faith is dead and worthless. Strong words!

St. Paul, in I Corinthians 13:13, adds his voice: “And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.” Love trumps our faith.

In the Lutheran tradition, we recognize how this emphasis on loving works seems to challenge the cherished teaching from Martin Luther that “we are saved by faith alone.” Martin Luther, and St. Paul before him, clearly saw how faith in Jesus Christ is a gift from God that brings salvation to sinners. Attempts to achieve salvation and righteousness before God by fulfilling the old law had failed. Faith in Christ is the key to a new life. The old law condemns and kills. Faith redeems. So why do good works?

The texts today shed light on those who claim to have faith but for some reason don't see any need for works of love. It's true, works of love do not justify us before God. But they will feed a neighbor, clothe someone in need, and create a community of love that makes life worth living. These acts of love flow out of a life of faith. If faith shows no evidence of love, it is empty and in vain.

What evidence of faith, producing works of love, have you seen in your life? Oh God, we celebrate and live out our faith, active in love. Help us to be blessings to each other. Amen.

-- Week of January 31, 2010