

Pastor Roy's Sermon from October 2, 2016

Habakkuk preaches in a war torn city. Or perhaps he's just around the corner of any town where common people are trampled and used for someone else's benefit. Habakkuk posts his complaint and waits for God's answer. The answer comes. It is a promise that the humble, patient work of the faithful is God's justice and peace. Habakkuk says, "Look at the proud, their spirit is not right in them, but the righteous live by their faith." Among all the questions, the clouds, alongside the uncertainties, fears, and anxieties, the faithful plod along, doing what they know to do, yes, at times, stumbling, but, at times, getting it right—but always in faith, trusting that it's not about them, but about God's mercy that holds it all together.

In the words of David Lose, "faith is found not in the mighty acts of heaven but in the ordinary and everyday acts of doing what needs to be done, responding to the needs around us, and caring for the people who come our way." Faith is the common stuff of living our lives. Not the heroic, amazing, jaw dropping, miraculous things we sometimes suppose faith is. Faith is not about mainly about walking on water, healing the chronically ill, or calming the storm.

These menial, simple tasks which fill our days are much, much more in line with the ways of the creator and creation, when we stop to think about it. Luther wrote, "When a father goes ahead and washes diapers or performs some other menial task for his child, and someone ridicules him [as an effeminate fool]...God with all his angels and creatures is smiling" (LW:45:50). As we do these tasks, for family, friends, community, and perfect strangers, we are practicing our faith. The world is shaped as we act. Faithfulness goes out in small ripples, small ripples which become great waves.

The disciples wanted a short cut to power and prestige. They still thought of faith as mainly about themselves. Jesus replied that even if they had the smallest faith, it would be plenty big enough. But they weren't interested in diaper faith. They would not understand until after Jesus is crucified and raised. I don't believe they could find faith until they gave up on Jesus as their ticket to fame and fortune.

In Luke Jesus points out who has faith. A woman's desperate confidence that if she only touches Jesus, she will be healed (3:48), a centurion's concern for a sick servant (7:9), a woman's gratitude at being forgiven (7:50) a healed Samaritan leper who returns to thank him (17:19), and the plea of a blind beggar for sight (18:42).

These are not about personal power and accomplishment, these are about desperation and passion for healing with gratitude. These are not about finding greatness in ourselves, but recognizing our brokenness and seeking healing with open hands.

We are tempted with the disciples to think of faith in terms of personal greatness and accomplishment. But Jesus is reminding us that it is not about me and you being great or doing great things. Faith is about seeing our great need and allowing God to meet it. To have faith is to allow ourselves to fall into mercy.

So faith really is quite simple. All we have to do is see how weak we are, confess it, and move on into God's peace. As we live in this peace we will serve and love in many simple, kind ways.

Thanks be to God for your need and your faith in God to help you in your need. Thanks be to God for the gift of faith and your faithfulness. Amen.

There are two separate meanings of the word Evangelical. 1950s, Billy Graham, Chuck Colson and many other along with the expression “born again” and “accepting Christ.” These have become popular over the past 60 or even 160 years and many assume them to be the essence of faith. They describe faith, but they are certainly not the only way to speak of faith.

Now for the other meaning. When we say Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, we are recalling our reformation history in Martin Luther and his peers. The Roman Church excommunicated Martin Luther for his demands for reform which offended Pope Leo X and many other leaders. A number of German princes and territories chose to follow Luther rather than the Roman church.

What is evangelical? The parishes in these territories became known as evangelical. Their priority was to learn and proclaim the Scriptures—especially the good news of God’s grace through faith. Many traditions and practices of the Roman church had come to take precedence over the Scriptures. Part of the reason for this was that not many people knew how to read and the printing press had just been invented.

Luther was shocked that the church did not welcome his reforms. And so the Western Church was split with both sides demonizing the other.

Evangelical speaks to the essence of what has come to be known as the Lutheran Church. Evangelical is the proclamation of the good news of God’s grace by faith. Evangelical better defines us than Lutheran, but the Lutheran name has stuck.

Our churches, the Roman and the Lutheran are trying their best to work through the misunderstandings and politics of the past 500 years and to reclaim our essential unity. We are on our way. (Prayer)