

# Daily Devotions

May 8-14, 2022

By Writers from Around the Synod  
For Synod Assembly Week

**Sunday, May 8, 2022**

By Andy Hill, LLM, Trinity Lutheran Church, Stambaugh, MI

Text: James 2:17

**So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.**

We Lutherans are always preaching and teaching what I call “the great equation,” which may be expressed as

salvation X grace ~ faith

When I say it aloud, it goes like this: “Salvation by grace through faith.”

When we read this pithy nugget from James 2, we begin to wonder if we’re on the right track. It would seem to indicate that there is something we must do in order to earn our salvation, or to gain God’s favor.

I see these words as a way of taking our spiritual temperature, checking the spiritual pulse. They speak to our reaction to a growing faith in God, the fruits of that faith within us.

Our growing faith should result in greater regularity in worship. It should help us to share the Gospel news of what God has done for us, and the whole world.

It will inform the way we relate to our family, friends and neighbors, and can extend to acts of charity we may undertake either individually or corporately, with our brothers and sisters in Christ. A living faith will bear fruit in Christian love for those within and outside our church family. Faith may well include a growth in our study of scripture, and our prayer life. And so much more.

We forever find ourselves trying to bargain our way to salvation. We say, if I do this, I get that. Notice how the subject shifts from God, and what he has done, to ourselves, and what we might aspire to do? We’ve put ourselves in the pole position, bending if not breaking the First Commandment, “You shall have no other gods before Me.”

A hero of the Protestant Reformation, our own Martin Luther, came to understand that there was nothing he could do to merit salvation. Instead, he understood that he was saved through the grace of God, God’s unmerited love, by faith. And he further came to understand that even the ability to believe, faith itself, was a gift from God.

So we work on building our faith — through prayer, study, the sacraments, worship, song, and

teaching — and then allow that growing faith to shape our daily living.

Let's pray: Dear Heavenly Father, we thank you for sending us your Son, Jesus, to atone for our sins. And we thank for loving us so well as to gift us with the Church, a place where we can worship together and nurture our faith.

Thank you for the Holy Spirit, a helpmate in our lives, literally lifting us up, walking with us when life's burdens are too great. And thank you for grace — God's riches at Christ's expense — to keep us in your presence always.

Amen

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## Monday, May 9, 2022

By Jill Flickinger, Ascension Lutheran Church, Minocqua, WI

### FAITH OR FEAR?

Text: Matthew 14:31

**“Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, ‘You of little faith, why did you doubt?’”**

Text: Isaiah 41:10

**“Do not fear, for I am with you, do not be afraid, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my victorious right hand.”**



I remember one of my Bible Study pastors often saying, “The opposite of faith is not doubt; the opposite of faith is fear.” I have come to see this as true. Jesus’s words in Matthew to Peter might suggest the opposite, that doubt is indeed the opposite of faith, but I don’t think Jesus is referring to doubt in the sense we usually think of it. I think what he’s referring to is fear. Peter was afraid, afraid of the sea, afraid he wouldn’t be able to survive the storm, afraid probably of death, and he was forgetting that Jesus is the one who saves. I think what Jesus is actually saying is: “Why are you afraid?”

I suspect we all suffer from “doubt” from time to time. After all, we’re human and can’t understand God or how God interacts with the world as we know it. We question, we study, we try. Our fellow travelers often help us understand or comfort us with the fact that they, too, don’t quite get it either. Sometimes our doubts are not satisfied with answers; sometimes we’re left with just the knowledge that, as God tells us in the Bible, our ways are not God’s ways.

Fear is something else. I suspect that the biggest fear that most humans face is the uncertainty of how and when life here will end. We do lots of things to fight that fear; we exercise, we use cosmetics, even surgeries to make us feel and look younger. Bigger than that, perhaps, is the fear of what I’m going to miss out on...will I live to see any great-grandchildren? Will I see my

grandson get married or graduate from college? Will my life here have had meaning? Will I leave anything behind that will show that I've been here and mattered?

The verse above from Isaiah is my Confirmation verse. It's a comfort to me when I'm facing those fears. Isaiah helps me to replace them with increased faith that comes from knowing these important truths: God has made promises to us. God is with us. God will strengthen us and help us. The Gospels provide us with other promises: God through Jesus will show us the ways that we do matter and how we can help others know that they matter, too. And in the end, we have another important promise from God: there will be a new heaven and a new earth. In all those promises God tells us we can live without fear. Thanks be to God!

Let's pray: God of Matthew and of Isaiah, Creator of all that there is, was, and will be, we pray that you will continue to send your Spirit to us, and that you will make our faith bigger than our fear. Amen

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## **Tuesday, May 10, 2022**

By Pastor Nicole Hanson-Lynn, Salem and Zion Lutheran, Ironwood, MI

Text: Mark 9:24

**Immediately the father of the child cried out, "I believe; help my unbelief!"**

The theme for this year's synod assembly is faith, a great topic for us Lutherans to discuss. We love, "we are saved by grace through faith," as we should. The trouble for us comes when we talk about faith versus works as a way of earning God's love; it's just too easy to turn faith into a sort of work that we use as currency with God. "Well, we just need to believe right," "If you just have enough faith, then..." "5 easy steps and you can have the right faith that saves you." We humans are just so tempted to rely on our own efforts! But the promise from God is that God is the one who saves us, and our faith is trusting that God is enough. So maybe we should all pray with the father in this passage.

Let us pray: We believe; God, help our unbelief!

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## **Wednesday, May 11, 2022**

By Pastor David Murphy, Good Shepherd Lutheran, Peshtigo

Text: James 2:17

**"So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead."**

Martin Luther called the letter of James an “epistle of straw.” In Luther’s mind, the letter lacked in its references to Jesus Christ and his death and resurrection. Perhaps Luther was correct, but his critique does not negate the wisdom conveyed in verse 17. The author of James correctly asserts that being a follower of Jesus Christ is not a passive venture.

While it’s true that our faith does not require anything in exchange for the freely given gifts of forgiveness of sins and resurrected new life eternal, it is reasonable for God to hope for a response to such love so abundantly given. Especially to ones as inherently unworthy as us sinners. In this letter, the author makes the argument that, as God does not value one life over another, so too should we. The author continues the point that if someone is suffering in some way, it does little good to offer “thoughts and prayers” or “best wishes” without addressing the core issue. As followers of Jesus Christ, we are called to love and serve God, and love and serve our neighbors as ourselves. Our faith demands that. Prayer is a crucial and powerful first step in showing that love and service, but it should not stop there. Active faith in Jesus Christ means actually feeding the hungry, actually advocating for the oppressed, actually speaking out against violence, and actually being the presence of Christ in the world.

The promised hope given to us by grace through faith does not require our action. After all, not everyone is equipped to “do what needs to be done.” But ALL are empowered with gifts of the Spirit to live out their faith in meaningful, active ways, both big and small. Is faith, without works, dead? Only God truly knows. But one thing is clear, Jesus **spoke words** of love and he **did works** of love. When people were hungry, he fed them. When people were hurting, he healed and comforted them.

Let us pray: Good and gracious God, we give you thanks for the gift of faith in Jesus Christ. May we always strive to live out that faith in an active way, giving thanks and praise by what we say, and by what we do, in the name of Jesus, ever hopeful that you will use what we offer as signs of your love, grace, and mercy to all those in need. In your Son’s most holy name we pray, Amen.

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**Thursday, May 12, 2022**

By Pastor Melinda VanderSys  
Our Redeemer Lutheran Church and First Presbyterian Church, Newberry, MI

Text: Psalm 116:10 (NRSV)

**I kept my faith, even when I said, “I am greatly afflicted”;**

We did everything according to guidelines (“we” meaning the church). We were one of the last requiring masks, social distancing, and refraining from physically sharing the peace. You name it. We were one of the last churches in our area that followed the strict recommended guidelines to protect our members from getting Covid-19.

We knew members were eager to celebrate Christ's Resurrection together. A brunch and fellowship were planned for Easter Sunday. What a joyous time! Until shortly thereafter, when Covid-19 hit with a vengeance (*please note: due to those who tested positive, we assume transmission occurred on Easter and at a subsequent gathering a few days later*).

Should we not have gathered? Should we not have celebrated? Did we let our guard down too soon? Do we have to wear masks and social distance for years to come? No. No. No. No. And yet, we must take a step back and ask ourselves, how did this happen? Did we miss something? And, how can we learn to live with this virus knowing that, in all likelihood, an outbreak may happen again?

Thankfully, no one from the church needed hospitalization but some are still dealing with lingering symptoms.

The psalmist tells us to *keep the faith, even when greatly afflicted*. There is no doubt that we were all afflicted with Covid-19 through our contact at the church. Yet, I'm pretty sure no one blames God, the church, or Easter Sunday for contracting the virus. And I'm quite confident that those who were afflicted with the virus will return to services as soon as they are healed.

Let us pray: Creator God, we thank you for the blessings of this day. We pray that those who are afflicted with pain and illness – physically, spiritually, emotionally, and financially – may be healed and brought to new life. We lift up those we ask special blessings upon, naming them in our hearts, our minds, and with our voices at this time (please name your prayer concerns). Continue to strengthen our faith; in Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

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## Friday, May 13, 2022

By Matthew Johnson, Immanuel Lutheran Church, Rhinelander, WI

Text: Hebrews 11:1

**Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.**

The congregation I call home will soon enter a period of unknowing, as our current pastor is retiring this month. As we prepare for this time of discernment, I find myself leaning on some wise words she once shared with me when reading scripture: to replace the word "faith" with the word "trust." The result of this theological and spiritual exercise has been profound.

When we think of faith, it is often relegated to simply having right and appropriate beliefs about God and church. Say the creeds, recite the Lord's prayer, worship on Sundays, understand the Trinity...all these things are important, but it can result in a very passive spirituality.

If we substitute trust in place of faith, which works quite well in the Hebrews verse, there is a new impact. Trust pushes us into an active faith, a living faith where we become engaged in what God is unfolding in our lives. No more grasping tightly to long-held beliefs.

Instead, we can embrace the gifts of hope and conviction, which are received gratefully when we loosen our grip and let trust settle in our hearts. The freedom we feel when we let go comes from the security of trusting our immanent God to walk alongside us as we clumsily find our way in the world.

Let us pray: Dear God, we give thanks for your eternal presence in our lives. May you always be the light for us as we strive to follow the path of faithful discipleship. We ask this in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

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**Saturday, May 14, 2022**

By Pastor Mike Markwell, Immanuel Lutheran Church, Escanaba, MI

Text: Romans 5:1

**“Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,”**

Have you ever felt like you had to prove your worthiness? Perhaps when you started a new job you felt that you had to take on every responsibility to prove that you were the right hire. Or maybe, when you became a parent for the first time you ran yourself ragged, trying to do everything perfectly to prove you were a good parent.

Often, our insecurities can drive us to extreme measures to prove we are worthy or that we belong. These words from the Apostle Paul give us permission to not feel forced into overdoing it. There are plenty of ways and opportunities to grow in our faith. But we don't need to feel like we must do it all. Our faith is not justified by the works we do, the committees we serve on, or the community service projects we participate in. These are all good things, but by no means do they prove that we are worthy of being called Children of God.

Our existence is enough. Our faith in Christ and identity as Children of God should bring us peace, not anxiety about proving that we are somehow worthy.

Let us pray: God, we give you thanks that we are enough, that our love and faith is enough. We pray that you give us a sense of peace and belonging when we feel we must show our worthiness through deeds and actions. Reveal to us ways to affirm in others their worth. We pray this in your name. Amen.

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