

## 10 AM Laity Sunday Sermon

June 12, 2016

by Trisha Moore

Now Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. –Hebrews 11:1-2

I'm going to be honest with you. I had a hard time crafting this one. I gave a sermon for Laity Sunday three years ago and the words just seemed to flow. I VOLUNTEERED to do it then because I don't mind getting up in front of people and especially up in front of my own congregation of lovely smiling faces 😊. I think I also had a message waiting inside of me to be told. It was in my heart and I had to just transfer it to my head, to paper and then to you all.

This time was different. Even now I am scrambling to finish amidst a power outage, my computer running off an extension cord to the generator. This time, I was asked and I think I came up with about three or four ideas of others who should be offered the opportunity instead. I *did* want everyone to get a chance! Finally, when no other hands were raised...I said yes. This one, this time, this sermon was not so easy. Why?

Maybe it was that I procrastinated. I kept putting other things first. Then, I tried sitting outside on one of the most beautiful days of spring after a week of rain and wrote. It was my first day off of school with the kids. My mind drifted to them and all we would do this summer. I wrote some more; then thought about how nice it would be to bike. I wrote a few more lines and then just went on that bike ride.

Maybe it was difficult because beyond procrastination I truly was and am "busy". I will admit that since becoming a Mom and especially this past year and a half I have found it hard to focus, to sit in silence, to reflect, to center myself and to put God at the center of my life...to slow a Mother's anxious heart.

Finally, what held me back from creating this sermon were the readings for today. I read them in the bulletin, I read them online and I read them from my New International Reader's Version Bible. It's not that they were, as some passages can be, confusing; but, more that they were so transparent...almost too easy. After reading them there was but one clear message (well, clear for a little while anyway). This message being: Faith.

In Galatians we have this teaching of Paul about obeying the law and living by faith. Paul says "No one is right by obeying the law. It is by believing in Jesus Christ." He says that same phrase again...and then even again. Paul's message is clear. We simply and without caveat need to believe in Jesus.

You would think then, with at least this reading, my message would be simple...you all get to go home a little earlier today! Well, wait...I still need to share all of my confusion with you. You see, when I am trying to get to the heart of the message I often look at the words before and after a reading. Take some time yourselves to read more of Paul's words to the people of Galatia and you will find him sharing revelations like: "James, Peter and John...asked only one thing (this was when deciding who would preach to the Jews and who to the non-Jews) they wanted us to continue to remember poor people." Wow! and "I can't rid of the grace of God." So, you see there was so clearly this message of faith but there was also so much more here and it weighed on my heart.

Moving on to Luke's powerful story of a woman, so much a "sinner" that everyone in the room knew her to be so. Upon Jesus entering Simon, the Pharisee's, home she knelt down, behind Jesus and at His feet, she cried so many tears that she washed His feet with them, she cried these tears of joy at being near Him (or was it tears of hope that Jesus would accept her?). Then, she dried His feet with her hair! Her hair. Think about this sketchy, sinful woman not only showing her provocative (think of culture, time and place) hair but using it to wipe the tears off Jesus' feet! Then, this woman, this SINNER...KISSES His feet! What a humbling act of intimacy...not intimacy of a lover...but of a worshiper...of one honoring another as her God. She finishes by POURING an expensive perfume on the feet of Jesus.

The story goes on with Simon questioning Jesus allowing such a sinner near him and then to be washing his feet in such a way and in front of guests! Simon loses faith that Jesus is even a prophet! Jesus should certainly know better. Jesus replies, as is His way, with a parable. A story of two people in debt who are let go of that debt and how the one who is "forgiven more will love a lot more." I saw more here too.

So, we have these big messages about passing judgement, forgiveness, faith, being saved by our faith not by our rules or actions or good works, grace, love.

The words Jesus ends with though in his story in Luke is faith. He says: "your faith has saved you. Go in Peace. Your faith has saved you." Not a forgiveness of your sins, not that you love me a whole lot, not that you treated me well as a guest or as God or you washed my feet and adored me and kissed me...your faith has saved you."

Faith. What exactly is it? Well, of course it has its definition: "complete trust or confidence in someone or something". "Strong belief in God or in the doctrines of a religion". "A belief not based on proof". There are many many quotes and stories and parables and passages about faith. I'm sure faith can also live in each of our hearts uniquely. For me, faith has always been this one, the words I began with: "Faith is being sure of what I hope for and certain of what I cannot see.

I had a pastor years ago tell me that you have to know that you know that you know that you know. That, to me is faith. Still my mind kept venturing away from this easier message of faith. Was it that I was focused more on hope? Was hope what I really wanted to talk about today?

It would make sense that hope was weighing on my mind and heart. Our family's past year has been filled with a lot of hope. When faced with childhood cancer, hope is what you cling to. Hope keeps you afloat. We so hope the medicines are doing their job. We hope the side effects are few. I hope people know how grateful we are. I hope we can keep it all together.

Hope's definition is "a feeling of expectation and desire for a certain thing to happen." Faith is different than hope. You can hope for the little things. That it doesn't rain for an outdoor family picnic. That you get home in time for your favorite tv show. That Santa brings you that one special toy you have always wanted. That your tomatoes finally grow this year. That you don't mess up the laity service sermon.

We also hope for some pretty big things. That we find a life partner. That our children will be healthy. That we live a long life filled of happy memories. That no one goes hungry. That the people of the world stop fighting.

Faith though is knowing. You have to know that you know that you know. That's faith. It is not hoping for something, waiting, trying, expecting...it is knowing. It is being sure of what you hope for and certain of what you cannot see. That's the other key to faith. You cannot see it. My Dad, as far as I know, although I wasn't in Vietnam with him...never saw Satan...yet, he always told me "when there is trouble...when something isn't right or I'm tempted, I say 'Satan, get behind me...and he does!' " It was that simple for him. That is faith too.

As I was attempting to piece together this message to you...I definitely knew it had to be about faith. Then, hope sidled up. How could it not? Hope is one of the three great gifts. Still, after all of this...after these powerful readings and these words to give to you...the message still didn't sit right. I couldn't complete my thoughts...what's missing, what's nagging me? Why couldn't I WRITE or THINK.

Then, I realized...as strong as my faith is I have an issue with it. That issue is this: "What about all of the people who don't have FAITH?" What if they just can't believe beyond seeing? How are they "saved"?

My own kids have a hard time with this one...but we can't SEE God...but He's really not there, Mom. One of my best childhood friends and cousins, while an amazing, loving, centered person who helps others and shines doesn't believe in *Jesus*...God, yes...well, maybe. I also have friends who don't keep the Faith or believe. I also know others that have loads of faith and fully believe (and will tell you so) but don't have much hope. Or don't live by their faith. So what then? What about their salvation...if not by Faith or Laws...then what?

Fortunately, I get out of this one...I'm not ordained...I am truly a lay-person here on laity Sunday. But, I will say what I think was on my heart...because I was asked here and I do get this chance.

I think what was nagging me was this third word... this thing, this gift, called Love. Maybe its like this...hope sets the stage, gets us looking forward. Hope to the end. Hope is what carries us...keeps us moving. Then, faith comes in. Faith is what binds us to God. Paul said: " I do not get rid of the grace of God". Faith is with us as our complete assurance or certainty, our KNOWING.

But love, though, oh, love is the greatest of these. Love is completely and utterly perfect, isn't it? Love your neighbor as yourself. Love is patient, kind, it does not envy, boast, is not arrogant or rude. It doesn't insist on its own way...it bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things. It never ends...

I cannot answer the question of what faith saves whom. Who loves a lot and believes little. Who is patient and kind but doesn't see. Who believes fully but is without love. Who is a good person but doesn't know....and how that all adds up to God (we can ask Pastor Mary Anne when she returns though!)

I do know this...in my own life...Faith has saved me...a few times. Faith came to me not by fear of what would happen if I didn't believe but by a real relationship with God. Yet, I'm still working out Love. I

know that I know that I know God, I'm certain I love Him and He's forgiven me much...but without love...me, I'm a resounding gong a clashing cymbal. I lose patience. I envy. I am rude. I want my own way. I have love within me, for sure, but it is an incredible work in progress.

Many of you here today, have faith. It is strong. Some of you may be working on it. Some may be questioning. I wish you well on your road. Have hope and it will lead you to faith. What I wanted to end with, though, today was a bit of sharing love; since this faith message confused me and turned me around (God did that) and led me to love. I would like to end by sharing, as a congregation, how you love? Completely. Does anyone want to share examples of love in their lives...either given or received?

-Open sharing-

We have many hopes and this world is so full of the faithful...let's remember these many ways that we also use this greatest gift...love.

So, go out. Be hopeful. Let that hope bring expectant and giddy joy. Live by faith and show others through your own solid faith how to believe beyond seeing...how to be sure of what they hope for. Above all, though, love. Love those that have a strong faith, learn from them. Love those that have little faith, build them up, foster hope in them. Love those that have no faith for your love will spark hope which might just flame into faith. Then, let them love you too. At any stage and place they are at. Love em anyways and be open to being loved. For as with faith and hope, love, is a true gift. It is, actually, the greatest of these.