

The Miracle of Faith

Sermon for the 3rd to Last Sunday of the Church Year

Sermon Text: Psalm 85



Lord, You were favorable to Your land; You restored the fortunes of Jacob.² You forgave the iniquity of Your people; You covered all their sin.³ You withdrew all Your wrath; You turned from Your hot anger.⁴ Restore us again, O God of our salvation, and put away Your indignation toward us!⁵ Will You be angry with us forever? Will You prolong Your anger to all generations?⁶ Will You not revive us again, that Your

people may rejoice in You?⁷ Show us Your steadfast love, O Lord, and grant us Your salvation.⁸ Let me hear what God the Lord will speak, for He will speak peace to His people, to His saints; but let them not turn back to folly.⁹ Surely His salvation is near to those who fear Him, that glory may dwell in our land.¹⁰ Steadfast love and faithfulness meet; righteousness and peace kiss each other.¹¹ Faithfulness springs up from the ground, and righteousness looks down from the sky.¹² Yes, the Lord will give what is good and our land will yield its increase.¹³ Righteousness will go before Him and make His footsteps a way.

Since the beginning of my work in the church, I have continually had to consider the following question: "How can I pass on to others what I know and experience of God?" I have stood in front of confirmation students who were sometimes more excited and sometimes less excited. I have stood before congregations that have known the Gospel since childhood and couldn't be surprised by anything anymore and perhaps had also forgotten their amazement. I have even stood before people who openly rejected the Gospel or had many reasons ready why they couldn't or wouldn't believe. And I constantly searched for words and examples so I could make it clear to the people what believing in God means for me. In doing so, I noticed that we all face a great mystery. Just as I can't find a sentence that can open peoples' hearts to faith; neither can I find such a magical formula for myself. I can't encapsulate God with a few smart or even mystical words. I can't say some words that then open heaven's doors and we all suddenly understand what it means to believe. And yet it happens that people believe. Still it happens that I believe and I am amazed sometimes about the fact that I continue to believe in God even though I can neither explain nor prove faith, much less understand it. I see something similar in the Psalm that we heard today. The Psalm is a prayer. A person stands before God and talks about things that move him. In doing so, he places his trust in the things God has done in the past. That gives him hope for the future. And because he has this faith in the God who is there in the past and in the future, he prays. These three things always seem to be at hand when it comes to believing in God. Faith, hope and prayer!

First, let's look at faith: amazing but true. Our faith is not something that I must swing high into the air in order to see amazing things. Nor is faith at any time directed at the distant future. Rather, faith refers to the past. What happened in the past is not only a good reminder but is the foundation and source of strength for faith in the here and now. So faith doesn't mean that we comfort ourselves with some

myths and fables so that the present becomes more tolerable. Rather, our faith depends on very concrete events that have happened in our lives in the past. One such tangible event is life in general. Without any doubt, it's clear that I am living. And I live because God directed certain events so that I can live. In addition, I think about many other events that happened in my life. I think about situations that were dangerous or frightening. And I thank God for the protection that He gave me to this day. But I also think about events that go beyond my personal life. First and foremost is the cross of Jesus Christ and His resurrection that stands as a great monument of God's love for me. At this point, God sealed His reconciliation with people and showed us that He loves us. God doesn't just love us. He also gave us a certain future. He did this by raising Jesus from the dead. Just as Jesus rose again, I will also rise from the dead. Everything that Jesus did on the cross was also tied to my personal life as I was baptized. Because through baptism, I am united with Jesus. I was baptized into His death as well as into His resurrection. That's why I share in Jesus' death and resurrection! These are all facts that happened in the past and that faith still gives me in this life, in the here and now. Yet one can't overlook the fact that our lives are very far from being perfect. All over the world, other facts are contradicting God's love and affection. There is unending suffering, war, and hate in our world. And far too many people see all that and can no longer believe in God on account of these evil things. The praying person in our Psalm also knows about these things. And we all experience similar things in our lives. When we see all of that, doubt and skepticism overtake us. I continually have the feeling that my prayers won't be answered. And I ask myself, how long will God hide Himself? Or has God forgotten us? And that's exactly why we need a second gift for our lives as Christians in this world. And that is hope.

You could say that hope is the twin sibling of faith. Hope is to faith like the anchor of a ship. We know that there are two things to an anchor: first, the anchor itself and second, the rope that connects the anchor with the ship. In the middle of a storm, we can only see the rope that holds the ship safe and secure. But the rope doesn't just disappear into the dark water. No, it is attached to the anchor. And only because it's connected to the anchor, can the ship remain safe. It's exactly the same with our hope. Our hope never goes out into nothingness. Our hope is connected to a solid anchor. The solid anchor is God Himself who made me, who repeatedly saved my life in spite of so many dangerous situations, and above all things, connects hope with God, who promised me salvation and eternal life through Jesus Christ. This hope which is united to the living God, can't remain silent. That's why I pray to God every day. I thank Him for protection in the past and I call on Him for the many needs that I see here and now. And sometimes, something amazing happens. Because I can already, in this life, sense and feel that God isn't far away. It is exactly like the ship in the storm. For the one who doesn't know about the rope and anchor, the ship is an amazing occurrence. It stands tied up in the middle of a raging storm. The Christian can remain firm in a raging storm because hope connects him with firm faith. The Psalm uses wonderful words to explain all of this. It says, such moments are like when steadfast love and faithfulness meet; or like when righteousness and peace kiss each other. And love grows and prospers among them all. God Himself looks from heaven and is pleased.

In the many storms of this world, these are the things that will carry us. Faith which appeals to God's past actions. And hope which looks to future blessings. And all this opens the mouth in great thankfulness and love. We Christians are similar to a pregnant woman. The child that grows in the womb is there without a doubt. The mother can feel it as it moves. For the mother-to-be, this is the evidence that the child will very soon be in her arms. That's why she also endures the pregnancy. Even when it's hard. So it is with us Christians. We already feel how faith moves in our lives. And that makes us look

hopefully to what must come. Sometime soon.... very soon, we will be in the loving arms of our Father.
Amen.