

Pastor Jon Strasman's First Sermon at Our Savior's Lutheran Church
in Neenah, WI. October 6, 2019

Text: 2 Timothy 1:3-14

"Faith = Trust"

Hello!

Thank you for calling me to be your new pastor. Thank you to Pastor Dennis Ellisen for stewarding Our Savior's so well during the interim process. I just love his New York accent and his stories. Thank you to our staff and volunteers for doing their jobs so well to keep things humming around here during the interim and for getting me ready for my first weekend. And thank you to the call committee and church council president, Sue Shultz, for warmly welcoming me and my family.

"Nice warm sermon, Pastor" Joke

I believe our lessons for today were hand-picked for my first sermon at Our Savior's Lutheran Church in Neenah, WI. They are about faith... having faith in the midst of things unknown. I feel these scriptures honor the grief associated with transitions, like saying goodbye to one pastor and having a new one come in. Or on a more personal note, for our family to move from one community where we were well established, to a new community, leaving family and friends physically behind. A lot of faith and hope goes into a move like this. But God keeps surprising us.

In the original languages of the Bible, Hebrew and Greek, the word "faith" can also be translated as trust or belief. I prefer the word, "trust" when I think of faith. To have faith in someone means you have come to trust them. To have a faithful marriage, for example, or a friendship means it needs to be built on trust. But in order to trust someone, you need to get to know them... spend time with them, eat with them, listen to what they say to you or about others. Just remember, if they talk behind people's backs, it says more about them, then about the person they are talking about.

When we received our foster daughter, Marcella, at 2.5 months old, (she is now three and legally a part of our family), she didn't seem to cry. We thought, wow, what a good baby. Come to find out, she didn't know how to cry for those things, because she didn't trust her needs could be met. This was a very heart wrenching revelation for us. But once she learned to trust us, trust me, she cried for what she needed, and not only that, she now even fake cries to get her needs met. Marcella has taught me that faith is built on trust.

So simply, having faith in God means you trust in God who is faithful to us... who provides for our every need. God demonstrated God's love for us most clearly in the person of Jesus Christ. Remember the verse, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, so that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." John 3:16. God loves the world, and you and me, just as we are. We don't have to get it just right for God to love us. And God gave Jesus to the world as a gift. And simply believing in Jesus gives us the gift of eternal life, both now and after we die. John's Gospel equates eternal life with the abundant life Jesus promises now when we believe. This is a promise. And in scripture, when God makes a promise, God keeps it. God is always faithful to God's promises because God is a God of fidelity. So when Jesus says in John 6, "I am the bread of life, whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty" Jesus promises to satisfy our deepest needs and spiritual longings.

Then, in our 2nd Timothy lesson, the Apostle Paul is writing a letter to Timothy to encourage him in his new ministry. Timothy is a young pastor just starting out. From the context clues, Timothy is experiencing tears and grief, probably because Paul is writing from prison and this Christian mission work was tough. Christians were suffering persecution for sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ at that time. Paul is encouraging Timothy to rely on his faith to see him through... the same faith Paul saw first in his grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice.

Two faithful women, Lois and Eunice are being lifted up for their faith, and Paul sees that same faith in Timothy. This is ground breaking to have these two women named, especially in the patriarchal culture the Bible was written in. Many of us are here today because of the faith and witness of the faithful women and men in our lives. I wouldn't be standing here today without my mom and dad taking me to church every Sunday I can remember. They still go every Sunday they can. And both of my grandmas were women of deep faith. My grandma Flory was a Lutheran and my Grandma Ruth was a Roman Catholic. Grandma Flory liked to have the pastor over for coffee and bars. Grandma Ruth was a prayer warrior. I believe both grandmas prayed me right into seminary without knowing it. Grandma Ruth would pray for me, my brother, and our family morning and night. And now my wife, Jeranna prays with me all the time.

Unfortunately, we cannot will our faith onto our children. We can witness to them in our daily lives, and try to live out faith as best we can, but they have to come to believe on their own. I wish it were as easy as passing on my love for the Packers, Badgers, Brewers, and Bucks to my kids. I got that one down. But then again, my love for these teams was evident to them. There is something to that.

According to the 3rd Article of the Apostle's Creed, Luther explains, that "I believe that by my own understanding or strength I cannot believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him, but instead the Holy Spirit has called me through the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, made me holy, and kept me in the true faith..." Our faith comes through the work of the Holy Spirit when we hear the Gospel... when we hear the good news of Jesus Christ. Remember, in order to have faith in someone, you need to get to know them. Spend time with them, eat with them. And in fact, that is what we are doing today. That is why coming to worship, hearing the word, studying the word, and taking kids to Sunday School and

confirmation is so important. God's word never goes out and returns empty according to Isaiah 55.

May the ministry God called me to here at Our Savior's in Neenah, WI, mutually encourage our faith and build up the body of Christ in the world.

Amen.