

**SERMON
JULY 16, 2000
FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH WAUWATOSA**

“WONDERFUL WORDS OF LIFE – FAITH”

TEXT:

**FOCUS: HISTORICAL AND THEOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDING
 OF THE WORD “FAITH”**

AGAIN WE SING “WONDERFUL WORDS OF LIFE”

**BY THE END OF 4 WEEKS WE WILL KNOW IT
 WITHOUT EVEN LOOKING AT THE WORDS.**

**I HAVE THE TASK OF PLACING SOME LIGHT UPON
 THE WORD “FAITH” FROM THE HISTORICAL
 AND THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE.**

BASICALLY WHEN YOU HEAR A SERMON ON SUNDAY MORNING

**THE PREACHER HAS DONE THIS WORK
 AS A PART OF THE RESEARCH FOR THE SERMON MATERIAL.**

**THEN... YOU ONLY HEAR ONE PERSPECTIVE OF THE WORD
 IN RELATIONSHIP TO THE SPECIFIC SCRIPTURE READING.**

**LAST WEEK, AFTER FLOODING YOUR MINDS
 WITH AN OVERLOAD OF INFORMATION ON “GRACE”
 I THOUGHT I WOULD OUTLINE
 SOME OF THE INFORMATION I SHARE WITH YOU ON
 “FAITH”.**

LET US TAKE A LOOK AT A DEFINITION OF “FAITH.”

---FAITH IS BELIEF IN SOMETHING - OR TRUST IN SOME PERSON.

**-----IN THEOLOGICAL TERMS...IT PROPERLY DESCRIBES MAN’S
APPREHENSION OF THE ABSOLUTE OR TRANSCENDENT.**

**“IT IS RESPONSE TO REVELATION AS CONTRASTED WITH DISCOVERY
 OF NEW KNOWLEDGE.”**

LET US LOOK AT THE WORD “KNOWLEDGE”

IT IS CORRELATIVE WITH FACTS OR INFORMATION OR TRUTH.
WE NEED TO BE A LITTLE CAREFUL WITH DIFFERENTIATING
TOO SHARPLY BETWEEN THE TWO WORDS

“FAITH” & “KNOWLEDGE”

FAITH MAY BE DESCRIBED AS A KIND OF KNOWLEDGE,
AND CERTAINLY REASON IS INVOLVED IN THE ACT OF FAITH.

FROM THE BIBLICAL STANDPOINT
WHICH WE ARE FOCUSING ON THIS MORNING....

THE OBJECT OF FAITH IS GOD.

I NOW DRAW YOUR ATTENTION TO THE OUTLINE ON THE WORD “FAITH”
AT FIRST GLANCE THIS LOOKS A BIT OVERWHELMING...

AND I KNOW YOU ARE ALREADY THINKING
HOW LONG YOU WILL BE SITTING HERE
ON THIS BEAUTIFUL SUMMER DAY.

FEAR NOT – A WONDERFUL BIBLICAL PHRASE!

HAVE “FAITH” THIS WILL ONLY TAKES MINUTES TO GO THROUGH.

****BUT I ENCOURAGE YOU TO TAKE IT WITH YOU AND DURING THE WEEK**

******YOU MAY WANT TO READ SOME OF THE SCRIPTURE READINGS**

AND THINK ABOUT THE CONCEPT OF FAITH

AT THAT PARTICULAR TIME AND PLACE IN HISTORY

AND HOW DOES THAT RELATE TO YOU

RIGHT NOW IN THE YEAR 2000.

BEGINNING WITH THE HEBREW TERMS FOR FAITH...

IT SIGNIFIES “FIRMNESS”

“STABILITY”

IT IS USED IN THE SENSE OF “BELIEF” AND “TRUST” IN A PERSON.

THE PRECISE MEANING IS “HOLD GOD” “TRUSTWORTHY”.

OR THE FUNDAMENTAL REALITY;

“NOTHING IS SO SURE, PERMANENT, OR RELIABLE AS GOD.”

*****IN CLASSICAL GREEK THE VERB MEANT**

“TRUST” -- “HAVE CONFIDENCE IN”

WHETHER OF PERSONS OR OF THINGS OR “BELIEVE”

IN THE SENSE OF “BE CONFIDENT THAT”

****AS A NOUN THE WORD COULD BE USED WITH REFERENCE**

TO THINGS DIVINE,

BUT FOR RELIGIOUS BELIEF IN A GENERAL SENSE

e.g. IN THE EXISTENCE OF GOD.

AS THE CENTURIES WENT BY

THERE WAS INFLUENCE OF GNOSTICISM

AND PHILOSOPHIC MYSTICISM

THE WORD BEGAN TO TAKE ON MEANING CONNECTED

WITH SALVATION AND IMMORALITY.

“FAITH IS THUS IDENTIFIED WITH THE HIGHER KNOWLEDGE WHICH IS

THE WAY OF SALVATION.”

AS WE MOVE ON IN HISTORY

CLOSER TO THE WRITING OF THE NEW TESTAMENT
THE MEANING “REVELATION”

COMES ABOUT WITH REFERENCE TO CHRIST
AS THE “PERFECT FAITH”.

LET US NOW LOOK AT “FAITH” FROM THE PERSPECTIVE
OF THE OLD TESTAMENT.

THE OT AS A WHOLE IS ABOUT GOD

AND MAN’S RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM.

FOUNDATIONALLY THE OT FAITH IS THAT GOD IS THE ONE
TO WHOM THE WORLD AND EVERY LIVING THING
OWE THEIR EXISTENCE AND ON WHOM
THEY DEPEND FOR THEIR SURVIVAL
AND WELL-BEING.

AS WE MOVE THROUGH THE OUTLINE YOU WILL NOTICE THERE IS A
MORAL RESPONSE

A RELATION TO THE COVENANT

(REMEMBERING THAT THAT COVENANTAL RELATIONSHIP RETURNS IN
THE NT AS JESUS CHRIST)

THERE IS A CORPORATE EXPERIENCE

WHICH WE READ ABOUT IN ALL THE PSALMS

**AND IN THE HEBREW RELIGION THERE WAS A SENSE OF THE NEED
FOR A “SIGN”**

**A “SIGN” MEANS THE PRESENCE OF GOD
AND HIS READINESS TO SAVE.**

**THEN WE HEAR THE HEBREW REFERENCE TO THE “FEAR
OF GOD.”**

FEAR OF YAHWEH (GOD) IS PARALLELED WITH HOPE IN HIS LOVE.

AND FINALLY WE COME TO THE POSTEXILIC PERIOD

FAITHFULNESS TO THE LAW

WHICH WAS THE DOMINANT EXPRESSION OF FAITH.

THE TORAH WAS IDENTIFIED WITH FAITH AND LAW.

IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

THE BASIC BELIEF IN GOD

IS PRESUPPOSED FROM THE JEWISH HERITAGE.

HOWEVER WE NOW HAVE A SENSE OF BELIEF

IN THESE WORDS OF GOD

OR THE WRITTEN WORD OF SCRIPTURE.

IT IS THE NEW TESTAMENT THAT THE MEANING OF “OBEDIENCE”

AND A CLOSE CONNECTION

BETWEEN FAITH AND HOPE APPEARS.

**IN THE TEACHINGS OF JESUS –
JESUS TAUGHT TRUST IN GOD THE FATHER.
JESUS’ FAITH WAS COMMUNION WITH GOD
TO WHICH HUMAN EXPERIENCE OFFERS NO PARALLEL
AND THE CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE OF HIS DIVINITY
AND UNIQUE SONSHIP.**

**IN THE PAULINE WRITING WE SEE FAITH IN RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD
IN THE NEW CREATION
FREEDOM
SONSHIP
CONTENT OF CHRISTIAN FAITH
LOVE
AND CONVICTION**

**THE GOSPEL OF JOHN CONNECTS FAITH
AND WITNESS
AND TESTIMONY**

**FAITH IN THE BOOK OF HEBREWS
IS THE SOLID REALITY OF HOPE,
CONVICTION ABOUT THE INVISIBLE WORLD.
THIS BOOK REFERENCES “FAITH” BACK**

TO OLD TESTAMENT WRITINGS.

THE BOOK OF JAMES DISPARAGES FAITH AS MERE BELIEF

IT NEITHER AFFECTS BEHAVIOR

OR CALLS FORTH PERSONAL TRUST

“EVEN DEVILS MAY BE SAID TO HAVE FAITH IN THIS SENSE”

THIS BOOK COULD BE REFERED

AS A CONTRADICTION TO PAUL’S WRITINGS.

THERE ARE VARIOUS THEORIES.

1. ONE MAY BE THAT JAMES WAS ACTUALLY WRITTEN BEFORE
THE PAULINE WRITINGS

2. OR THE MORALISM OF JAMES REPRESENTS THE INFLUENCE
IN THE CHURCH OF THE ETHICS OF HELLENISTIC JUDAISM.

JUDE AND REVELATION COME OUT OF THE SECOND OR THIRD
GENERATION OF CHRISTIANS

WHERE FAITH CAN BE USED TO DENOTE THE BASIC DOCTRINE
OF CHURCHES THAT AT THAT PARTICULAR TIME IN HISTORY WERE
BECOMING CONSCIOUS OF THEMSELVES

IN A NONBELIEVING ENVIRONMENT.

REMEMBER JEWISH WRITINGS WERE BASED UPON A
TRUST IN GOD. NOW WE HAVE OTHER
“NEW FOLLOWERS OF THE “CHRISTIAN” TEACHINGS.

AS YOU SEE “FAITH” HAS BEEN FILTERED TO US

OUT OF HISTORY, LINGUISTICS,

PHILOSOPHY, MYSTICISM, ETHICS AND LAW.

**TO ME I BEGIN TO GRASP THE UNDERSTANDING OF FAITH FROM THE
QUOTE WHICH I HAVE ON MY WALL AT HOME AND I SHARE WITH YOU
TODAY.**

**FAITH...WHEN WE WALK TO THE EDGE OF ALL THE LIGHT WE HAVE
AND TAKE THAT STEP INTO THE DARKNESS OF THE UNKNOWN,
WE MUST BELIEVE THAT ONE OF TWO THINGS WILL HAPPEN...**

THERE WILL BE SOMETHING SOLID FOR US TO STAND ON.

OR, WE WILL BE TAUGHT HOW TO FLY.”