

**MINISTRY BY MAIL**  
**Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship**  
[www.lutheranlccf.org](http://www.lutheranlccf.org)  
**Third Sunday After Epiphany, January 26, 2020**

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 376, 372:1, 377:1-7, 381, 49.

Lessons: Genesis 15:1-6, Romans 10:1-17, Luke 8:4-15.

Sermon Text: Romans 10:17 NIV and KJV Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

***“Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.”***  
***“So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”***

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Today we want to talk about faith – faith in God. You know, believing, having trust in, putting your confidence in.

Faith has been illustrated by this (hold up a dollar bill) piece of paper with black and green ink on it. It has value because of faith. People believe this is valuable, because they believe that anywhere in the world this is worth \$1.00. Another example is faith in bridges. You believe that the bridge you drive over will be safe. You trust that it won't collapse – until that trust is broken, just as an interstate highway bridge collapsed in 2007 in Minneapolis. But today we are talking about a much more important faith, a greater faith.

Scripture makes it clear that

**FAITH IN GOD COMES – AND IS SUSTAINED – BY HEARING THE WORD OF GOD**

1. **This was true since the time of Adam and Eve, and**
2. **This is still true today.**

The first examples of faith in the Scriptures are found in Genesis, where God stated this promise in chapter 3: ***“I will put enmity between you [Satan] and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.”*** Genesis 3:15 (NIV) When Cain, her first-born son was born, she mistakenly believed that he was the Savior promised in chapter 3. Mankind had to live by faith in the coming Savior for several thousand years before the Savior actually came fulfilling the promises God made in the Old Testament.

Throughout the Old Testament we find examples of faith. The New Testament letter to the Hebrews defines faith and then gives Old Testament examples of faith. ***“Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for. By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible. By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was commended as a righteous man, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith he still speaks, even though he is dead.”*** Hebrews 11:1-4 (NIV) Then that chapter goes on to list 15 other believers by name and lumps “the prophets” together as examples of faith in God. We find words such as these in Genesis 15: ***“Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.”*** Genesis 15:6 (NIV)

So faith in the coming Savior, believing in God, was not unknown before Christ came to earth to fulfill God's promises.

Paul in his letter to Romans desires especially that his fellow Jews be saved eternally through faith in Jesus Christ. The chapter from which our text comes begins: ***“Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved.”*** Romans 10:1 (NIV)

Then he goes on in the verses leading up to our text: ***“Moses describes in this way the righteousness that is by the law: ‘The man who does these things will live by them.’ But the righteousness that is by faith says: ‘Do not say in your heart, “Who will ascend into heaven?” (that is, to bring Christ down) or “Who will descend into the deep?”’ (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? ‘The word is near you; it is in your***

*mouth and in your heart,' that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: That if you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. As the Scripture says, 'Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame.' For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile--the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, 'Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'*" Romans 10:5-13 (NIV)

God has made it clear that it is only by obeying the law perfectly that one could be saved eternally. Isaiah told us that, too, when he wrote *"How then can we be saved? All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away."* Isaiah 64:5-6 (NIV) James is even more blunt when he tells us: *"whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it."* James 2:10 (NIV)

So our obedience to the Law of God, unless it is perfect obedience, doesn't save us. God's Son, Jesus Christ, is the only one who kept God's law perfectly.

It is faith in that Jesus Christ and what he did for you that saves eternally. That is the only way. It was that way for Adam and Eve. It was that way for every single believer before Christ came to earth. It was that way for all the believers in the Gospels. It was that way for every believer in Paul's day, and for all believers throughout the New Testament and up until this very day.

And today, faith in Jesus Christ and what he did for you is the only way!

So then how does that saving faith come? *"Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ."* Romans 10:17 (NIV) *"So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."* Romans 10:16-17 (KJV) It is only through hearing the Word of God. The Word of God is the way that faith begins and grows.

We might talk about a parallel idea of how living plants come into existence. Somewhere that living plant had to be planted. Surely some of you are even now thinking about planting seeds. How will your corn, or soybeans or tomatoes or herbs or anything that requires you to plant seeds begin and grow? And, of course, the things you don't have to plant this year, like raspberries or apples, started from some kind of seed or root stocks.

There is nothing living except by coming from some other thing which is able to give life. Except for creation, all living things come from their seeds or eggs or embryos. Of course, we who believe in a six-day creation realize that this is the big hole, the critical flaw in all theories of evolution: Evolutionists keep asking 'how did life really start?'

Before you put the seed into the soil, you get the ground ready. Then the seeds need sunshine, water, and nutrients to feed them so that they can grow.

Faith in God started by hearing the Word of God. God has given us no other way.

Man cannot turn to God by himself. Man cannot believe in God without God beginning, starting, and feeding faith. It is God's Words that create and sustain faith.

The Word of God has two main teachings: Law and Gospel. You probably remember the simple idea that the Law of God "shows us our sins". The Law of God – the written Law, which we recognize as the Ten Commandments – as well as the Law written in the hearts of humans – leads us to guilt and shame and teaches us that we are all sinners who deserve God's punishment of death and damnation. Because of natural law written in the hearts of men, there is sometimes also a sense of shame and guilt. But the clearest teaching of the Law of God is from the Word of God. People learn from the Law that they haven't done what is right, and that they have done bad things.

Law – God's law, and then also the laws men have made – you know, the civil laws we don't obey or obey half-heartedly? – shows us our sinfulness. Our disobedience makes us feel bad, inadequate, ashamed and guilty.

The Law condemns sin and in a sense readies our hearts to receive the Gospel.

So does the Law of God save us? No. Only the Gospel saves.

So when we read and understand the scriptures that *"Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ"* – *"So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God"* we realize that it is the Gospel which works faith.

It is that Gospel, which is found only in the Word of God, that motivated Paul to write in the first chapter of this letter to the Romans: *"I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is*

**revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: 'The righteous will live by faith.'**" Romans 1:16-17 (NIV)

It is that Gospel which works faith.

And if anyone does not hear the Gospel, he cannot have faith planted in him. If anyone does not continue to hear the Gospel, any faith begun in him by the Gospel cannot live and grow.

It is this Gospel which is a means or way by which God delivers to us his undeserved love and mercy, his grace. That is why we identify the Gospel as a means of grace. Without God's grace we and all mankind would be condemned to hell eternally. With God's grace in his Word working and sustaining faith in us, we have eternal life in heaven. Paul calls this Word **"the Word of faith we are proclaiming."** Romans 10:8 (NIV)

The beginning, progress, and strength of faith comes by hearing. But it is only hearing the Word of God that will strengthen faith.

The Word of God is called the Word of faith: it creates and nourishes faith. God gives faith, but it is by the Word as the instrument. Hearing the appealing words of man's wisdom does not create or strengthen faith, but hearing the Word of God will create and keep faith alive.

Paul speaks of the power of the Gospel in First Corinthians: **"For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel--not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God."** 1 Corinthians 1:17-18 (NIV)

Faith comes from a message that has been heard. This message comes from and by the use of the Word of God. Faith comes in no other way. Faith does not come by asking, but from getting to know God. One writer said "The longer we spend with our Bible in getting acquainted with God, the stronger, more practical, and more blessed will our faith be."

Preaching the Gospel and receiving the Word of God in Baptism is the means of salvation. Faith in Christ is the result of hearing the Word, the doctrine of the Gospel preached. God sends preaching. God assures us through the prophet Isaiah: **"so is my Word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it."** Isaiah 55:11 (NIV)

Speaking of his grace, God says **"It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy."** Romans 9:16 (NIV)

Faith does not exist unless there is a message to be heard or believed. It cannot come in any other way than by such a message; in other words, unless there is something made known to be believed. This shows us the importance of the message.

And how is that faith to stay alive? Just like any living thing, faith needs food. That food is also the Word of God. Without hearing the Word of God, faith will wither, disappear and die.

In our Epistle lesson, we also find a commission to preach that Word of God which works faith. Without faith, there is only eternal damnation. With faith, there is eternal blessedness with Christ in heaven.

Our text is another confirmation of the truth that faith presupposes the hearing of the Word and also a commission to proclaim it. The content of the hearing is defined by "the Word of Christ." To receive this Word is to receive Christ, for the living Christ is conveyed through his Word. And this spoken Word can produce faith in the hearer.

And how is this Word to be given to mankind? That is your calling. You heard about sending someone to tell it: **"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.' How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!'"** Romans 10:13-15 (NIV)

So does that mean that only those who are sent out as missionaries or preachers are to proclaim, tell and teach the Word of God? No. Jesus gave this command to all of his disciples, not just to ministers or missionaries: **"go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you."** Matthew 28:19-20 (NIV) And this command: **"Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation."** Mark 16:15 (NIV)

You have this responsibility. You are to reach out with the Word of God together with the example of your faith, shown by its fruits, which include God-pleasing lives. May our lives always witness the truth that **"faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God."** Amen.