

Dear members and friends of St. John,

How often do we wish that we had **the same faith** as some of the great ones of Scriptures? Take Jairus, for instance:

Now when Jesus returned, the crowd welcomed him, for they were all waiting for him. And there came a man named Jairus, who was a ruler of the synagogue. And falling at Jesus' feet, he implored him to come to his house, for he had an only daughter, about twelve years of age, and she was dying... While he was still speaking, someone from the ruler's house came and said, "Your daughter is dead; do not trouble the Teacher any more." But Jesus on hearing this answered him, "Do not fear; only believe, and she will be well." And when he came to the house, he allowed no one to enter with him, except Peter and John and James, and the father and mother of the child. And all were weeping and mourning for her, but he said, "Do not weep, for she is not dead but sleeping." And they laughed at him, knowing that she was dead. But taking her by the hand he called, saying, "Child, arise." And her spirit returned, and she got up at once. And he directed that something should be given her to eat. And her parents were amazed, but he charged them to tell no one what had happened. [Luke 8:40-42, 49-56, ESV]

Jairus believed – and it was indeed counted to him as righteousness. Jairus was still a sinner, but **because of his faith, Jesus demonstrated the effects of trusting in the Word of God by healing his daughter.** When we read of such encounters, we wonder about our own faith. How would our faith stack-up to Jairus' faith?

To answer this, let's examine **what faith is** and **what faith is not.**

First, faith is not some good work that God must gloriously reward on earth. God was **not obligated** to raise Jairus' daughter – He did so to show the importance of believing in His Son. Note that **faith is not** believing in some "fuzzy" god who refuses to reveal Himself to us – some kind of "life-force of nature" that can't be understood. The **only true faith is faith in our triune God**, who reveals Himself to us through the work of His only son, Jesus Christ. **True faith trusts in the cross of Christ for our personal redemption.**

Second, faith does not come from **great knowledge** or **some secret insight** into God's Word. Jesus Himself tells us that **the faith of a little child** is what we should aspire to have (Mark 10:15). Little children don't have great knowledge or secret insight into God. They simply trust.

Third, faith is not some inner feeling, or something that we can **capture and hold on to** – like some great prize, that once found, we can parade around with. If you think you **feel faith inside of you**, it's probably indigestion. Again, little children don't seek to "feel" God's presence; they simply believe that it's true.

That leads us to examine **what faith is.** Faith is nothing more and nothing less than **a tool** that God gives us to believe in, and therefore trust in God's holy Word. Dr. C. F. W. Walther, the first president of the LC-MS, puts it this way: "*...faith grasps and dedicates itself to the Word of Christ and, with it, Christ Himself.*"⁴¹ Note that **the object of faith is not faith itself.** Faith does not save, per se. Instead, faith allows us to believe in Christ's life, death, resurrection, and ascension. Not just as knowledge, like memorizing a story so that we can recount it whenever we want. No, faith allows us to cling to the very message of Christ, trusting that it indeed applies to us for our very salvation.

The danger of course in talking about faith, is that **people might focus on it, instead of God's Word**. In a simplistic way, it's like Chinese hand cuffs. You know, the piece of curled paper that you wrap around both index fingers. The harder you pull on the curled paper, the tighter it closes down on your fingers. Faith is similar in that the harder you try to concentrate on it, the more that you're hindered in your ability to grasp it. In the end, **we don't focus on faith – we focus on growing in the Word of God**. Why? Because it's in the Word of God that faith is given and strengthened (Rom. 10:17). Walther concludes: "*So it is **not** faith that does great things, but Christ, who is grasped through faith.*"⁽¹⁾

So what are some of **the signs of great faith**?

First, faith produces in us a love of God's Word. Sure, all of us from time to time tune-out when the Word of God as it is said or preached in Church. But a love for God's holy Word indicates that faith is active in making you **care** about what you're hearing. Remember, to the unbeliever, the word of God is nonsense (1 Cor. 1:18-25). To the person of faith, it's a treasure. If you don't see God's word as that important, this is a sign for you to pray and meditate on the Word. Join a Bible study – immerse yourself in the Word. Count on God to do the rest.

Second, faith leads to the very power of God helping you put aside your sin – the sin that is troubling your heart and mind. Walther says, "*Those who pretend to have faith but who can overcome neither their indwelling sin nor the world and its enticements experience no such change. They remain the same as before, slaves of their passion and worshipers of the world's deceiving riches.*"⁽¹⁾

Remember, we can't put aside sin completely – we will be sinners until we die. What Walther is saying is that sin shouldn't have complete control over us. We should see the effect of our faith, as God helps us to reign in the sin that is trying to destroy us.

Third, faith drives out fear. Are you fearful about the future? Do you wring your hands when thoughts of dying are brought to mind? A confident trust in Christ drives out fear. Jesus, Himself, said "Do not fear; only believe..."(Luke 8:50). Again, our sinfulness will make the unknown future a concern, and we may lapse into fear – but that's either a momentary lapse, or a sign that our faith needs strengthening.

Fourth, faith leads us into an active and healthy prayer life. Show me someone with a practically nonexistent prayer life, and I'll show you someone who needs to be built-up in Christ Jesus. As we grow in faith, our prayers will become **more frequent**. Then there's the **change in content**: our prayers become more centered on our spiritual concerns (both for ourselves and others). Also, you will find yourself **thanking God more**, and **complaining less**, as your Godly blessings become more self-evident.

Fifth, faith leads us to care about others. We don't want to see others suffer. We want them to live with the confident hope that their sins are completely covered by Christ's blood, shed for them. We want them to be with us in heaven and to avoid the eternal darkness of hell. In short, we care about their physical wellbeing, and their spiritual health.

So, if I've completely confused you about faith, remember this: **God's Word** (and that includes the Word embodied in the Sacraments) **provides us with all we need**. In times of weakness, **the**

Word is the very power of God (Rom. 1:16). We are strong when we rely on **His power** and **strength** (2 Cor. 12:10). So, **a strong faith is not a confident self-reliant nature found within us, but a completely dependent nature that relies totally on God's holy Word.** Do you want to move mountains? Put your shovel away, and turn to God's holy Word.

Pastor Travis

⁽¹⁾ *God Grant It: Daily Devotions from C. F. W. Walther*, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, c. 2006, pp. 869-871.