**Faith – Believe It or Not**

Good Morning! It’s great to see you this morning! It’s obvious some of you didn’t realize Edgar wouldn’t be here today. You may have stayed at home instead.

For those of you I haven’t met, I’m Sondra Townsend the Lay Leader for New World. If you don’t know what that position means, it means I go to a lot of meetings. My position is to serve as the laity representative for New World not only within this church but at the North Texas Annual Conference. That’s just a lot more meetings.

For the past 9 weeks a great many of us have been participating in the Wesleyan Roots study, about the theological basis of the United Methodist Church. We’ve learned about God’s abundant Grace and our Baptism, Free Will given to us by God and Holy Communion. There are other topics we’ve studied so far, and we have three sessions left. There are still opportunities for you to join in or to catch up using the online materials.

What about **FAITH** in general? Not Methodist faith, or Baptist faith or Catholic faith. Just **FAITH**. The dictionary defines **FAITH** as complete trust or confidence in someone or something. Merriam-Webster specifically defines **faith** as “**belief and trust** **IN** and loyalty **To** God.” **Faith** and **trust** have similar meanings, and we often use the words interchangeably. For most people there is no practical difference between faith and trust.

In **Hebrews 11:1**, **faith** is defined as **“the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen”**. In other words, faith involves trusting in something you cannot explicitly prove. Faith is inseparable from trust; it’s the confidence that God can and will do what He says.

**Faith** and **trust** are very much like the team building exercise called “**trust-fall**”. Here’s how it works. We’ll call our group “**Team Disciples**”. In the Trust Fall activity, one member of Team Disciples, we’ll pick **Judas**, stands on a platform, or on the floor in front of the rest of Team Disciples, facing away from the team. Judas will stand upright and rigid with his eyes closed then fall backwards. Judas is relying on the support of the other **Disciples** to catch him. It requires Judas **falling** and **trusting** the rest of the disciples to catch him before he hits the ground.

Judas has **faith** that Team Disciples will catch him. He believes Team Disciples will not let him fall. Here the act of falling is the **TRUST**. Judas demonstrates the **FAITH** by just falling backwards letting the Disciples catch him. I’m not sure what the outcome of Judas and Team Disciples might be. However, we need to play the “trust fall” game with **our** **faith**. Falling back and **trusting** that God will catch us.

From this example we can say these two things - **Faith** without **trust** is not faith; **Belief** without **trust** is empty. We can study the Bible for years; we can research the scriptures through hundreds of resources to learn the facts about Jesus Christ. But knowing and proving those facts to be true is not what the Bible means by “**faith**.”

The word **FAITH appears** 458 times in the NIV version of the Bible. **TRUST** can be found 351 times. **Faith** is more than just reading the words but believing in God with your whole heart. **Faith** in God means we believe that God will do what He says He will do. We believe it so absolutely that we are willing to act upon that **faith** and **trust**.

God doesn’t give us a timeframe for His actions. He doesn’t work within our time, but in His own time. Often times we get impatient waiting on God to take action. So what do **we** do? We take matters into our own hands; forgetting to turn it over to God and have **FAITH**. Sometimes we experience negative results because of our impatience.

This is exactly how Abraham acted in the Old Testament book of Genesis. In Chapter 12, v2 God says to Abraham – ***“I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you and make your name great; And you shall be a blessing”*.**

God also promised to give Abraham an offspring who would ultimately become a great nation too. Many years passed and Abraham and Sarah did not conceive a child. So Sarah took matters into her own hands…not waiting for God. Sarah knew that Abraham needed an heir, so she offered her servant Hagar; and Hagar bore a son that Abraham named Ishmael. As you might image, there was trouble between Sarah and Hagar. God had to intervene as He often has to.

It took a long time before Abraham and Sara were blessed with an offspring. Abraham was 99 years old and Sarah 90 when God blessed them with a son Isaac. Even though he and Sarah were very old, Abraham never lost **faith** and **trust** in God.

Later in the story, when Isaac is just a boy, God called upon Abraham again. God is testing Abraham’s **faith** by telling him to sacrifice his son Isaac as a burnt offering to God. Even though he loved his son dearly, Abraham did not hesitate to obey God. His **faith** was great, and he **trusted** God, willing to sacrifice his son just as God had instructed him. Abraham built an altar and laid Isaac on it. He took the knife and was ready to sacrifice Isaac. Because of Abraham’s **faith** and **trust** in God, He provided the sacrifice and Isaac was saved. And Abraham was blessed with many descendants – just as God had promised.

There are so many **FAITH** stories in the Old Testament - Moses, Esther, Noah, Job, and countless others. All stories of **FAITH** and **TRUST**. Through the Old Testament Prophets, God promises a savior. It took hundreds of years for God to deliver on that promise only because the people had little or no **faith**. They failed to **trust** God and His word. For them – *“****Seeing was believing”.***

The Birth story of Jesus is familiar to all of us; Mary’s unwavering **faith** in God’s promise; Joseph **trusted** the angel of the Lord and took Mary as his wife; God **trusted** Joseph to raise His only son; shepherds **trusting** the angel of the Lord and seeing the Christ Child for the first time.

When Jesus began his ministry, He called ordinary men to have **faith** in his mission and **trust** him without fail. These disciples gave up their lives, all they had, to follow Jesus – simply through **FAITH** and **TRUST.** That would prove to be a difficult task as times. The disciples would suffer, sacrifice and deny knowing Jesus out of fear. Where was their **faith** then?

One example that I love is in Matthew 14 and of course it’s about Peter. I can always identify with Peter and his shortcomings. After hearing about the beheading of John the Baptist, Jesus went away to a quiet place to be by himself. As soon as the people heard where Jesus was, they followed him. Jesus began preaching to the crowds gathered by the sea. After feeding the 5,000 with just 5 loaves and two fish, Jesus instructed the disciples to get into the boat and go before him while he sent the crowd away. Here’s how the story goes.

**Matthew 14:22-33**

***22Immediately he made the disciples get into a boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. 23And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, 24but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land,[***[***b***](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=matthew+14-15&version=NRSVUE#fen-NRSVUE-23622b)***] for the wind was against them. 25And early in the morning he came walking toward them on the sea. 26But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, “It is a ghost!” And they cried out in fear. 27But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, “Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.”***

***28Peter answered him, “Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.” 29He said, “Come.” So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus. 30But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and, beginning to sink, he cried out, “Lord, save me!” 31Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, “You of little faith, why did you doubt?” 32When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. 33And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, “Truly you are the Son of God.”***

How many times have we used that verse “**You of little faith**”?

Another great **faith** story is about Jesus’ disciple Thomas, better known as Doubting Thomas. The story comes from the **20th Chapter of the** **Gospel of John (20:24-29)**. On the day of Jesus’ resurrection, the disciples had gathered together behind closed doors because they were afraid of the Jews and what they might do to them. Thomas was not with them. The other disciples told Thomas they “had seen the Lord!”.

***John 20:24-25***

***24But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. 25So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.”***

For Thomas, ***seeing was believing***. The question is “did Thomas **have** **faith** in the risen Christ or not”? Why did he need proof instead of having **faith**? After all Jesus had told the disciples many times He would die He rise again on the third day. Let me read this scripture from the Book of John.

***John 20:26-29***

***26A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” 27Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.” 28Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” 29Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”***

Often times I’m skeptical just like Thomas. I don’t necessarily believe something just because someone says it’s true. When Thomas doubted, Jesus responded with one of the most powerful and prophetic statements about **faith** in all of Scripture:

“***because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” (John 20:29)***

Jesus may have challenged Thomas’s doubt, but He also didn’t condemn him for his lack of **faith.** Instead, He came down to Thomas’s level, overcoming his fear and uncertainty with compassion and [grace](https://www.christianity.com/theology/what-is-grace.html). How much more is Christ willing to do for those who struggle with **faith** today?

In today’s world our **faith** in humanity is challenged almost daily. We can be unsure, or even skeptical about our **FAITH** and **TRUST** in God because of the circumstances of the world. These are the times when our **FAITH** must be strong and steadfast. We must **TRUST** that God is in charge. I think these scriptures from Hebrews 11 and 2 Corinthians 5 can help us to remain **faithful** and **trust** in God. **Let’s read these scriptures together.**

**Hebrews 11:1**

***“faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see”***

**2 Corinthians 5:7**

“***For we live by faith, and not by sight”.***

**Closing:**

During the short 3-year ministry of Jesus, he performed 34 miracles, not including the miracle of his own birth. The disciples and a great many of those who would come to follow Jesus witnessed these miracles. Multitudes coming to believe Jesus Christ as the Savior.

But what about you?

You didn’t see Jesus turn water into wine. Yet you believe.

You didn’t see Jesus walk on water. Yet you believe.

You didn’t witness Lazarus raised from the dead. Yet you believe.

You didn’t see the lame walk, the blind to see, and the sick well again. Yet you believe.

**You didn’t witness the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Yet…you believe. Amen.**