

MY FAITH LOOKS UP TO THEE



A SERVICE FOR REFORMATION

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ABOUT THIS SERVICE

This service for Reformation focuses our attention on the true faith we have in Jesus by his grace.

Our faith in him is not something that we earn or achieve, but something that is given to us through the Holy Spirit. By faith we come to know that we are forgiven, blessed and saved by the very Son of God.

Everything you need for the service is contained on digital files with text of the entire service in .rtf (rich text format), newsletter/bulletin notices, hymns, visual media recommendations, contemporary music song suggestions and a PowerPoint document of the services with images and text (along with a copyright release) for use on screens.

This service contains: a complete order of service • a sermon • a children's sermon • prayers • music for the accompanist

- The **Epistle Reading**, Galatians 3:23-29, is spoken by the pastor or other worship leader:

Ⓟ Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

- The **Gospel Reading**, Luke 5:17-25, is spoken by the pastor or other worship leader:

Ⓟ On one of those days, as he was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting there, who had come from every village of Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem. And the power of the Lord was with him to heal. And behold, some men were bringing on a bed a man who was paralyzed, and they were seeking to bring him in and lay him before Jesus, but finding no way to bring him in, because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and let him down with his bed through the tiles into the midst before Jesus. And when he saw their faith, he said, "Man, your sins are forgiven you." And the scribes and the Pharisees began to question, saying, "Who is this who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?" When Jesus perceived their thoughts, he answered them, "Why do you question in your hearts? Which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Rise and walk'? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—he said to the man who was paralyzed—"I say to you, rise, pick up your bed and go home." And immediately he rose up before them and picked up what he had been lying on and went home, glorifying God.

- The **Sermon Hymn** is sung by the congregation to the tune Yigdal 6684 D, or a selection from the contemporary music song suggestions list at the end of the music guide for this service can be sung instead:

The God of Abr'ham praise, who reigns enthroned above;
 Ancient of everlasting days, and God of love;
 Jehovah, great I AM! By earth and heaven confessed;
 I bow and bless the sacred name forever blessed.

The God of Abr'ham praise, at whose supreme command
 From earth I rise, and seek the joys at his right hand:
 I all on earth forsake, its wisdom, fame, and pow'r,
 And him my only portion make, my shield and tow'r.

The God of Abr'ham praise, whose all-sufficient grace
Shall guide me all my pilgrim days, in all my ways.
He deigns to call me friend; he calls himself my God;
And he shall save me to the end, through Jesus' blood.

He by himself has sworn; I on his oath depend.
I shall, on eagle wings upborne, to heav'n ascend.
I shall behold his face; I shall his pow'r adore
And sing the wonders of his grace forevermore.

- The **Sermon** is delivered by the pastor:

¶ Grace, mercy and peace be to you on this Reformation celebration. “My faith looks up to thee,” the songwriter says. But what does faith mean exactly in this context? Martin Luther puts it this way, “Faith is a living, bold trust in God’s grace, so certain of God’s favor that it would risk death a thousand times trusting in it. Such confidence and knowledge of God’s grace makes you happy, joyful and bold in your relationship to God and all creatures” (from “An Introduction to St. Paul’s Letter to the Romans,” Luther’s German Bible of 1522).

This confidence and certainty in God and his graciousness toward us does not come naturally to us. It comes to us only by the Holy Spirit. “The Holy Spirit makes this happen” Luther says. He explains, “Because of [faith], you freely, willingly and joyfully do good to everyone, serve everyone, suffer all kinds of things, love and praise the God who has shown you such grace. Thus, it is just as impossible to separate faith and works as it is to separate heat and light” (from “An Introduction to St. Paul’s Letter to the Romans,” Luther’s German Bible of 1522).

The main message of the Reformation is that we are saved by grace through faith. Faith is like the hand that leads us to the free gift of salvation in Jesus. We cannot do anything to earn faith or make faith within us. Faith is something that is planted in our souls and then grows in response to the blessing of God. Everything we say and do is done in thanksgiving to God for his undeserved goodness toward us.

The church in the time of the Reformation had the concept of faith turned around. Faith, to them in that day, was something to be achieved or accomplished by human will. People were taught they could gain favor from God by praying more often, giving more money to the church or buying papers called indulgences that purported to forgive sins.

This backward thinking of faith is one of many reasons that Martin Luther posted his 95 *Theses* on the Castle Church door in Wittenberg, Germany, on October 31, 1517. Martin Luther revealed to all that faith is a blessing to us, not some sort of trophy to be obtained by hard work. The faith in Jesus we already have in our hearts from God through the Holy Spirit motivates us to joyfully love and serve God and others. It is not something that forces us to do

certain things out of a sense of duty or a sense of pride.

We love because Christ loves us. That is faith. We serve because Jesus served us by giving of himself and going to the cross for us for the forgiveness of sins. That is faith. We listen to and learn from the Word of God to understand him more. That is faith.

“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen,” the writer of Hebrews tells us (Hebrews 11:10). By faith, we are assured that we are children of God. We are confident in the hope of heaven, which awaits us. We know there is a God who loves us and cares for us, even though we have not seen him in person. That is faith at work in us.

How does faith show itself to the world? For that we go to Scripture and to the story of a group of friends carrying a paralyzed man on a stretcher.

Faith is revealed almost immediately in this account from our Gospel Reading in Luke 5. In verse 18 we read: “Some men were bringing on a bed a man who was paralyzed, and they were seeking to bring him in and lay him before Jesus.” These men were not bringing the paralyzed man to Jesus for their own benefit. They were doing it out of love and concern for their friend who could not walk. Sounds like faith in action to me. The men certainly did not go about this willy-nilly. You can tell they had a plan. They figured out the best way to haul their friend to Jesus. They must have known and had confidence in Jesus’ power to heal, so they most likely did some reconnaissance work, tracking Jesus’ schedule and finding out where he was going to be. They took time off work and time away from their families for an undetermined period to carry out this mission. Faith is what drove them.

But when they got to their destination, they ran into a dilemma. Jesus was in a house that was so crowded with people that the men could not get their friend on the stretcher through the door. But their faith did not stop them. Their faith in Jesus helped them to think outside the box and lower their friend on the stretcher down through the ceiling to directly in front of Jesus’ feet. They literally “raised the roof” to help their friend, an appropriate metaphor, since they were probably just as excited and energized as a person at a party today would be who is said to “raise the roof” in celebration.

“When he saw their faith,” the Bible says, Jesus forgave the man on the stretcher (Luke 5:20). These words from Scripture prove that the faith of the friends and the faith of the paralyzed man were apparent to Jesus. Faith had brought the men to Jesus. Faith had brought the man in need to Jesus. Faith had made an appearance in pretty dramatic fashion, quite literally out of the clear blue sky, if you will. This is faith Jesus recognized and appreciated and knew was authentic and focused exactly in the right place: solely on him.

Jesus made it clear in this very moment in the story that the greater problem for this man was not his paralysis, but his sinfulness. We are also paralyzed, if you will, by the power of sin in