

Twenty Fourth Sunday after Pentecost – November 8, 2015, Year B

St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Various

"Your Faith Has Made You Well"

Today we are very blessed to have 3 remarkable readings that deal specifically and how God responds when people trust in Him, simply having faith – because He is God!

Before we look at any other Scripture passages, let us begin with today's Holy Gospel reading from Mark 12 on page 1580 of the Pew Bible. Jesus is in the Temple and describing the difference between true faith and a hypocritical "show" put on by some simply for others to see. True faith comes from the heart and is not a show or demonstration for others – but between you and God. Let's begin with verse 41: *"Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts." "But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a fraction of a penny." "Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others." "They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything--all she had to live on.""* (Mark 12:41-44) This woman loved God so much that she wanted to honor Him by giving all that she had to live on and trusted that God would be faithful to her in return. If that is not a step of faith, I don't know what is! She wasn't giving to get. You might hear about the "prosperity bible – there are some preachers that say "if you give this much money you are going to get a Cadillac and more." That is not where we are at folks! We don't give to get and like this widow, we are giving because we have gotten and wanted to return to the Lord what was rightly His in the first place. Don't get me wrong – this is not a sermon about "giving." This is not asking you to get out your checkbooks and do this and that. That is a wonderful thing, and we pray that you will do that, doing what God has told you to do; even responding to Wesley's letter – however that is going to be. It is about FAITH!

The amazing faith that this woman displayed was not unlike the faith of Abraham in Genesis 22. This is one of my most favorite parts of the Bible. Let me tell you about that faith: God spoke to Abraham and told him to take his son, his only son to a mountain in the Moriah region, (a three day journey away) and to make him a burnt offering on one of the mountains that God would show him. Imagine waiting all the time that Abraham and Sarah did for this child of the promise of God, the one from whom Abraham's descendants would end up being as numerous as the stars in the sky, and God wanted him sacrificed? But Abraham didn't question God, he was obedient and the next day set out with his son, their donkey, the wood for the fire, and two servants on a three day journey. When they arrived at the mountain, Abraham took his son, Isaac, placed the wood on Isaac's back, while he carried the fire and the knife, and told the two servants to wait, while *"we go and worship, and then **we** will come back to you."* He didn't waver for a minute – somehow he knew that God would save the boy, maybe even bring him back to life! **He knew he had to obey.** As they climbed the mountain, Isaac asked his father *"we have the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb?"* Here is where Abraham's faith shines through – he told his son **"God Himself will provide the lamb."** Isn't that amazing? *"God Himself!"* They went to the top of the mountain and Abraham took the wood, placed his

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son on top of that wood and tied him up. When he reached for the knife and was about to sacrifice his only son, Isaac, the Angel of the Lord called down from heaven to Abraham *"Do not lay a hand on the boy," he said "Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because **you have not withheld from me your son, your only son.**"* Whenever you see "the angel of the Lord" in the Old Testament it is believed that that is the "pre-incarnate" second person of the Trinity - Christ. Who else could say *"you have not withheld your son from me?"* God then provided a substitution for Isaac, a ram caught in the thickets. Abraham exhibited such obedient faith that God saved his only son. Amazingly, that very place would become the site of thousands of sacrifices for hundreds of years – as it was where Solomon built the Temple of God; the Temple Mount – Mount Moriah. Even more amazing, God's only son, Jesus would climb that very mountain, Jerusalem, putting the wood for His sacrifice on His back, and giving His life as a sacrifice – substituting for you and me. There was no ram waiting for Him, He was substituting for us! **God Himself provided the Lamb!**

Let me share with you another account of putting faith into action – trusting God completely – because He said so! Today's Old Testament lesson on page 551 of the pew Bible – we read 1 Kings 17. The Prophet Elijah was directed by God to go to the town called Zarephath and there he would find a widow who would provide him with food. He went there and by the city gate sure enough there was a widow who was gathering sticks. He asked her for a drink of water and then added that he would like her to bring him a piece of bread. Her response was not what you might expect. Look at verse 12 where she says *"As surely as the LORD your God lives," she replied, "I don't have any bread--only a handful of flour in a jar and a little oil in a jug. I am gathering a few sticks to take home and make a meal for myself and my son, that we may eat it--and die."* Elijah knew that God would provide for them because He had sent Elijah there, and so he tells her in verse 13 and 14: *"Don't be afraid. Go home and do as you have said. But first make a small cake of bread for me from what you have and bring it to me, and then make something for yourself and your son." "For this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'The jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry until the day the LORD gives rain on the land.'"* Elijah trusted the Lord completely because He had seen the Lord keep His promises and "knew that he knew" that the mercy of God would shine through. We just sang "standing on the promises of God my Savior." Amazing!

Surely enough, the woman made the cake just as Elijah had told her and miraculously there was enough food for Elijah, the woman and her son. Verse 16 of this Scripture says *"For the jar of flour was not used up and the jug of oil did not run dry, in keeping with the word of the LORD spoken by Elijah."* (1 Kings 17:16) But there is more to the story that is not a part of our reading for today. What about the woman's son? Let me tell you: *"Some time later the son of the woman who owned the house became ill. He grew worse and worse, and finally stopped breathing." "She said to Elijah, "What do you have against me, man of God? Did you come to remind me of my sin and kill my son?"* *"Give me your son," Elijah replied. He took him from her arms, carried him to the upper room where he was staying, and laid him on his bed." "Then he cried out to the LORD, "O LORD my God, have you brought tragedy also upon this widow I am staying with, by causing her son to die?"* *"Then he stretched himself out on*

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the boy three times and cried to the LORD, "O LORD my God, let this boy's life return to him!" "The LORD heard Elijah's cry, and the boy's life returned to him, and he lived." "Elijah picked up the child and carried him down from the room into the house. He gave him to his mother and said, "Look, your son is alive!" "Then the woman said to Elijah, "Now I know that you are a man of God and that the word of the LORD from your mouth is the truth."" (1 Kings 17:17-24) This woman spoke a word that goes hand in hand with faith and that is truth! Jesus spoke about truth when He said in John 8:32 *"you shall know the truth and the truth will set you free!"* He also told us where we can find the truth – and that is in Him – the living Word of God. On the night before He died, Jesus told His disciples *"I am the Way and the Truth and the Life, no one come to the Father except through Me."* (John 14:6) Truth, belief and faith go hand in hand!

How many times have we heard through the Bible of people being healed simply because of their faith? Let us look at one very important and powerful example of this. In 3 of the Gospels: Matthew 9:18-22, Mark 5:25-30, Luke 8:43-48. Whenever an account is in more than one Gospel – you know it is important. While Jesus is on the way to visit the home of a man named Jairus because his daughter was near death, a woman who had been hemorrhaging for 12 years worked her way through the crowd because *"She said to herself, "If I only touch his cloak, I will be healed.""* (Matthew 9:21) *"Jesus said to her, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering.""* (Mark 5:34) Only then did Jesus continue on to Jairus' house where He raised his daughter back to life. First, Jesus needed to heal this woman who had probably spent a fortune on doctors trying to get well during those 12 years, spending all of that time as Biblically "unclean." She was considered an "outcast to society." Jesus restored her to health and to society - and He gave the credit, not to Himself, but to her faith.

The author of Hebrews in today's New Testament reading sets his readers straight that the Day of Atonement when the High Priest goes into the Holy of Holies sacrificing the blood of animals for the forgiveness of Israel's sin is NOT what Christ was doing on the cross at Calvary. If His dying was all about sacrificing someone else's blood, every year – it would be meaning less – but the faith that Jesus had in the Father helped Him to fulfill what the Father commanded to do and would once, for all time satisfy the debt caused by the sins of the world – and His sacrifice would be timeless – carrying through to the final judgment. He shed His own blood once – unlike the Jewish Day of Atonement which points to the ultimate sacrifice that would take place near the Temple in Jerusalem. We already spoke about Jesus carrying the wood for His sacrifice, up that mountain and there on a hill called Calvary - He gave His all. That author of Hebrews wrote *"Then Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But now He has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of Himself." "Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment," "so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and He will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for Him."* (Hebrews 9:26-28) I grew up as a Roman Catholic, and that is not a bad thing, it was a good thing, because I learned about Jesus, the Gospel, the Bible was in our house (unfortunately it was on a coffee table.) It was not until I moved to

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Jacksonville, and became an Episcopalian at the time, with our bishop, as our rector, then the Fr. Neil Lebhar, that I got my own Bible. I wanted to read and to study the “red letters.” I wanted to know what takes place at this table that is different than our Roman Catholic brothers and sisters. They believe that the “sacrifice of the Mass” has Jesus being sacrificed each time it is offered, while we as Anglicans believe that the only sacrifice that takes place during our service or “mass” is the sacrifice of “ourselves, our souls and our bodies” – a living sacrifice – in thanksgiving and remembrance of what Jesus Christ did for us as “the Lamb of God” – “who takes away the sins of the world.” And “***so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people.***”

In just a few minutes we will be celebrating and remembering Jesus’ sacrifice and just before you come forward to receive the “real presence” of Jesus Christ’s Body and Blood – I will hold before you at the altar the bread and the wine proclaiming “**the gifts of God for the people of God – take them in remembrance that Christ died for you – and feed on Him in your hearts by faith with thanksgiving.**” The Holy Spirit will fill you with the “real presence” of Christ – through your faith and belief in Him, so that you will be strengthened and nourished spiritually for the days to come. “*Your faith has made you well!*”