

# The Faith of Christ

By: Meagan McLaughlin

Date: October 27, 2024. By the faith of Christ, we are saved. Today we celebrate that faith with Isaac, Luke, and Luther as they are confirmed, taking the next step in their journeys and inviting the Spirit to come among them with peace like a river, joy like a fountain, and love like the ocean.

Readings: [Jeremiah 31:31-34](#), [Psalm 46](#), [Romans 3:19-28](#), [John 8:31-36](#)

\*\*\* Transcript \*\*\*

As we celebrate Reformation Sunday, and we confirm Luke, Luther, and Isaac today, I've been finding myself thinking about our founder Martin Luther's confidence that we are saved by faith and not by works. This is one of the hallmarks of the Lutheran tradition in which the three of you will be confirmed today: remembering the promises of our baptisms. And all of our readings today, especially the letter to the Romans, assure us of this promise. Often, we hear that we are saved by faith and think of faith as something *we* do — *we* have faith *in* Christ, and by our faith *in* Christ, we're saved. This requires some learning and reflection. And after all, if we're to have faith *in* Christ, we need to know something about him, don't we? And for the last two years, Isaac, and Luther, and Luke, you have been doing that. You have been studying the scripture and the Creed and the commandments, the Our Father, the catechism, you've been participating in worship, you've been serving your community, and preparing yourselves to take this responsibility for your faith in a new way.

Ironically, in this tradition that teaches us that we are saved by faith, this sounds kind of like work, doesn't it? The idea that our being saved, being welcomed and loved by God, depends on our own understanding is kind of scary actually, a bit little overwhelming perhaps. It reminds me of my own Confirmation preparation. In a one-on-one meeting with my youth minister, with a very serious face, he handed me an enormous old Bible, and told me that if I was going to be approved for Confirmation, I needed to find certain passage, pretty obscure, very quickly in a set time limit, and then he would tell me it was okay for me to be confirmed. All of the blood must have just drained from my face, because he immediately tried to assure me he was joking. But I still carried a whisper of fear that the Bishop would make us recite the answer to a catechism question before anointing us with the sacred oil. I won't be doing that today, I promise.

Way back, some 500 years ago, Martin Luther had something to say about this. He had something to say about a lot of things, actually. One of them shows up right in our catechism, where Luther provided an explanation of the third part of the Apostles' Creed, the part where we profess belief in the Holy Spirit. Luther writes, "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith. In the same way He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith." Were any of you kind of saying in your head as I said that? I see a few nods.

In text study this week, and coincidentally at the Synod's Theological Conference last week, we talked some about this. And in both places, we realized that the Greek language in Paul's letter, where it talks about faith *in* Jesus Christ, is actually better translated faith *of* Jesus Christ. Paul goes on to remind us that we are all sinners, all broken, and all fall short of God's call for us, and it is God's grace that gathers us together and makes us whole.

Isaac, Luther, and Luke, fourteen-ish years ago, at your baptisms, your parents and this faith community claimed that truth on your behalf, knowing that you were not perfect, sinless, or unerring in your belief, and yet that you are beloved, cherished children of God, breathed into life by the Spirit who never fails even when we do. Today we stand with you, alongside you, and claim that truth, as you by that same Spirit claim that truth for yourselves.

People of Christ, today as we celebrate Confirmation with these youth, remember our own baptisms, and recall Martin Luther's call to reform our church, we come together certain of one thing: the work of reformation, the work of confirmation, the work of faith, is not our work, but God's.

Jeremiah does not say that we write God's word on our hearts, but that God writes the promises, call, and life of the law on our hearts. God makes a new covenant with us, each one of us, and all of us together, that is expansive and inclusive, not defining who's in and who's out, but claiming all people as beloved children of God.

The psalmist sings that God is our refuge, in the midst of the challenges that inevitably come in life. We are reminded today in all of our scriptures, and by the witness of Martin Luther, and by the witnesses of these youth that you will hear from shortly, that in the midst of our joy and our brokenness, in the midst of the beauty and brokenness of creation, in the times where we feel our faith deeply and those times we are a bit distracted and yes, even those times when God could not seem further from us, God is present. By the faith *of* Christ, God has been with us since before we were born. In our first breaths, in every season of our lives from the most painful to the most joyful, right up until the moment of our deaths, God's promise will never fail.

By the faith *of* Christ, Jesus says in our gospel today, we are freed. We are freed to be the people God has created us to be, freed to make mistakes and make amends, freed to turn away and turn to back towards. By the faith *of* Christ, we are freed to embody the love, justice, and mercy of God in the world, in our words and in our actions, even when it seems impossible to us. We don't do this because we have to do this in order to earn God's love, to secure our seat at the right or left hand as we discussed last week, to deserve forgiveness. We do this because we see what God has done for us, and we can't help ourselves.

By the faith *of* Christ, we are saved. Isaac, Luke, and Luther, today we celebrate that faith with you. We lift you up in prayer as you take this step in your own journeys, inviting the Spirit to come among us with peace like a river, joy like a fountain, love like the ocean. Today with you, we remember and affirm the promises of our baptisms: from our first breath to our last, God is with us in Christ. Let us go out from here to share that good news with the world.

Thanks be to God.

\*\*\* Keywords \*\*\*

2024, Christ Lutheran Church, Webster Groves, sermon, podcast, transcript, Pastor Meagan McLaughlin, Jeremiah 31:31-34, Psalm 46, Romans 3:19-28, John 8:31-36, Luke Dopuch, Luther Ciorba, Isaac Helton, Confirmation, Reformation Sunday