

Sermon preached at Faith Presbyterian Church, Springfield, Virginia,  
on Sunday, October 4, 1987, by the Rev. W. Graham Smith, D.D.

## **INAUGURAL SERVICE**

### **MATTHEW 9:28**

“According to your faith will it be done to you.”

### **THE MEANING OF FAITH**

I am particularly gratified by the name you chose for our new congregation. When the matter of a name first came up, my wife said to me, “Wouldn’t it be appropriate to call it ‘Faith Presbyterian Church’ since we are moving out in faith according to the leading of the Lord?” We discovered that other believers had the same idea, and on the Monday after the picnic, as we drove home from Toronto, we kept saying, “I wonder what name they decided upon on Saturday!” So you can imagine our joy when we ascertained your decision.

“Faith” is indeed a splendid name, because faith is one of the great words of the Bible, signifying as it does the link between a condemned sinner and his Saviour.

Here is a man in a small boat a mile up river from Niagara Falls. His outboard motor has malfunctioned, and he is drifting swiftly to his doom. A man on the shore throws him a rope which he catches and ties around the seat of his craft, whereupon his rescuer pulls the boat safely to shore. Now the rope did not save the imperilled man (although without the rope he would not have been saved); but it was the man who made the rope available to him who was his saviour. Likewise, faith is the rope, the link, that unites us to Christ our only and all-sufficient Saviour.

In our New Testament lesson this morning we saw Jesus healing two blind men. As our Lord walked along the road, these men kept calling out as they followed Him, “Have mercy on us, Son of David!” And apparently Jesus took no notice of them—He was testing them to see if they really believed He had the power to cure their blindness. But when He entered a house, and they followed Him right in, still beseeching His mercy, He knew they meant business; and so He turned in compassion toward them and said, “Do you really believe that I am able to do this?” “Oh, yes indeed, Lord!” they exclaimed, whereupon He touched their eyes and said, “According to your faith will it be done to you!”; and the miracle of healing took place, and their sight was restored.

And Jesus is still in the miracle-working business. We are going to see miracles of transforming grace performed here in our new congregation—“Faith Presbyterian Church”—and the Master is saying to each one of us:

“According to your faith will it be done to you!”

So we had better pray continually and with impassioned zeal for the gift of faith.

Now let me speak to you about the meaning of faith in a way which, I trust, you may carry with you from this sermon, and remember as long as you live. Picture a large screen on the wall behind me, and on that screen is projected in large capital letters the one word **FAITH**.

What does faith mean? Three things, and the first is this:

**1. Forsaking All I Take Him.**

I love that passage in the Gospel where Jesus called the fishermen Peter, James, and John to be His disciples. We read that “they pulled their boats up on shore, forsook all, and followed Him” (Luke 5:11). These men were so captivated by our Lord that they made a clean break with the past and a new and complete commitment to a Master they knew they could trust.

For us, faith means forsaking utterly our old life of sin and failure, turning our back upon everything that grieves our Lord, and starting out upon the road that leads to holiness and victory. But faith also means forsaking our own goodness. You’d be amazed at how many unconverted people pride themselves on their own good living, reject the idea that they need a Saviour, and are shocked and infuriated when a Christian tells them that they must be born again! They think they are having complete success in working their passage to heaven! And yet the Word of God says that “all our righteous acts are like filthy rags” in God’s sight (Isaiah 64:6).

You remember the Parable of the Wedding Banquet (Matthew 22:1-14), and the man who tried to gate-crash the party. He was cast out because he did not have on “the wedding garment.” At an Eastern wedding the parents of the bride provide a white robe for each invited guest. It is their ticket of admission, so to speak. And Jesus provides for us the spotless white garment of His perfect righteousness; and by faith we put on that robe, and it covers both our sin and our goodness, and when God looks at us, He sees not the filthy rags underneath; He sees only the perfect righteousness of Christ which we have appropriated by faith! That is precisely what Paul means when he says in Romans 13:14, “Clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ”!

Paul also puts it so beautifully when he writes in Philippians 3:8-9, “I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for Whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith!”

**Forsaking All I Take Him.**

The Shorter Catechism of our Presbyterian Church speaks of “embracing Christ as He is freely offered in the Gospel.” Isn’t that a beautiful expression?—“embracing Christ” as a lover would embrace his beloved. It means coming to Jesus as a hell-deserving sinner, and reaching out our arms to Him and saying,

“Nothing in my hands I bring  
Simply to Thy Cross I cling!”

Have you embraced Jesus like that? Have you by faith taken Him, accepted Him as personal Saviour from sin’s guilt and power? That’s what faith is all about—realizing our need and accepting the only cure for our fatal malady. In Jesus and in Him alone we have healing and salvation.

Forsaking All I Take Him.

## 2. **Feeling Afraid I Trust Him.**

There was that dark and stormy night on the Sea of Galilee when Peter, in a superb demonstration of faith, went walking on the water to meet Jesus. But when he heard the wind shrieking, fear gripped his soul; he took his eyes off Jesus, looked down at the tempestuous sea, and immediately began to sink. The moment he looked down, he went down!

That’s so like ourselves, isn’t it? We experience the tempests of life, the unexpected reversals, the broken dreams, and fear grips our hearts. We take our eyes off Jesus, and we begin to sink.

We have embarked upon this venture of faith—a new congregation with its challenges and its call for renewed commitment and personal sacrifice. And, my friends, if we ever take our eyes off Jesus, we will become apprehensive, and we will say to ourselves, “Is this thing going to fly?” And Satan will have a field day as he encourages us to be afraid. But I tell you—if you keep your eyes firmly fixed upon the risen Lord, He will inspire and nurture trust within your soul!

Feeling Afraid I Trust Him.

Faith can so unite us to the risen, living, victorious Christ that fear becomes a defeated foe, and we can say with John Henry Newman,

“So long Thy power hath blest me, sure it still  
Will lead me on,  
O’er moor and fen, o’er crag and torrent till  
The night is gone...”

Faith assures us that we are within the will of God, that we are obedient to the heavenly vision, and that therefore no storm can ever cause our ship to founder.

I like the story of the little girl on board ship in mid-Atlantic on a terribly stormy night when the passengers were numb with fear. The little girl was calm and unafraid, and when someone asked her how she could be so courageous in the midst of such a storm, she said, “But my Daddy’s the captain, and I know he’s on the bridge right now!”

## Feeling Afraid I Trust Him.

When we were in Ocean City, New Jersey, on vacation this summer, we heard Dr. Norman Vincent Peale preach to a crowded congregation in the great Ocean City Tabernacle. Dr. Peale is now in his 90th year, and preaching the Gospel with the same conviction and enthusiasm that he has always demonstrated through the years. He told a story that caused quite a chuckle. Some months ago he was asked to address the annual banquet of the Funeral Directors Association of Missouri, in Kansas City. It was a black-tie affair, and Dr. Peale arrived suitably attired, and was ushered into an anteroom where those who would be sitting at the head table were waiting to make their entrance. Each of them was receiving a white carnation, and a rather diminutive lady, a funeral director, attempted to pin on Dr. Peale's carnation. She was having a most horrible time reaching up, and attempting to attach the flower, and in her futile efforts she only succeeded in sticking him with the pin a time or two. And, finally, with a smile she said, "Dr. Peale, I could do this much more easily if you were lying down!"

Well, as a lively, enthusiastic, Christ-honoring new congregation we're not lying down, paralyzed by faithless fear. We're on our feet, with our eyes firmly fixed upon Jesus, the Author and the Perfecter of our faith, We are not afraid because our trust is in the Lord of the Church Who has led us to this hour, and Who will guide and bless and empower us every step of the way.

## Feeling Afraid I Trust Him.

### **Finding Another I Tell Him.**

Genuine faith must be communicated. If you're not telling others, you really don't have it. Paul says in Romans 10:9, "If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved." If you truly believe in Jesus, then inevitably you will want to confess Him by introducing Him to others. Jesus Himself said, "Whoever confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father in heaven. But whoever disowns Me before men (that is, by our silence and our refusal to witness), I will disown him before My Father in heaven." (Matthew 10:32-33).

You remember the disciple Andrew, a quiet, unassuming man, who never—could preach like Peter, his brother, nor achieve the notoriety of his illustrious sibling. But never forget—Andrew became a disciple before Peter did. Listen to what John tells us, "Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who had followed Jesus. The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Peter and tell him, 'We have found the Messiah!' (that is, the Christ). And he brought him to Jesus" (John 1:40-41). You see, Andrew's faith was authenticated by the fact that he communicated it the moment he believed!

Jesus said to those first disciples, "Come, follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men" (Mark 1:17). Now, run that through the wringer backwards, and what do you get? "If you are not fishers of men, you are not following Jesus." And that's pretty scary, isn't it?

I like the story of the little dog with the broken leg. His owner brought him to the

veterinarian, who set the leg and cared for him until he was fully recovered. And do you know what? A few days later there was a scratch at the doctor's door, and there was the little dog, wagging his tail, and he had with him another little dog with a broken leg!

D. T. Niles, the famous missionary from Sri Lanka, used to say that "Evangelism is one poor beggar telling another poor beggar where he can find bread." Evangelism is of the very essence of faith.

#### Finding Another I Tell Him.

Sometimes an individual will say to me, "My faith seems so weak; doubts assail me and temptations overwhelm me. I feel that I'm not a very good Christian." And I invariably say to such a person, "Are you trusting Jesus as best you know how as your personal Savior and Lord?" "Yes, Pastor, I am." "Well," I say, "are you telling others about Jesus; are you sharing your faith; are you seeking to introduce others to the One Who has saved you?" "No, Pastor, I'm not." And that is why faith is so often weak; that is why doubts assail, and temptations gain the victory.

And what an opportunity we have, as a new evangelical congregation, to make our witness in this area where the Lord has placed us. Do you know that off this Franconia Road corridor up to 5,000 new homes are being or will be constructed? And if we gird up our loins and get on with a concerted program of evangelism, God will bless us, and the church will grow with amazing rapidity. I challenge you to prove your faith by your zeal for evangelism.

If you want to see people with really strong faith, people on fire for Christ, then make contact with those men and women who have been trained to lead souls to Christ, and who are actively engaged in this soul-saving ministry.

#### Finding Another I Tell Him.

Let us, from this very first day of our existence, be a Company of the Committed, remembering that faith is not like gasoline which diminishes in quantity as you drive. Rather it is like a muscle which grows stronger as you use it.

So when you think about faith, do remember these three simple sentences:

1. Forsaking All I Take Him.
2. Feeling Afraid I Trust Him.
3. Finding Another I Tell Him.

"This is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith."  
(1 John 5:4)

Thank God for Faith Presbyterian Church!

**AMEN.**