

Sermon preached at Faith Presbyterian Church, Alexandria, Virginia,  
on Sunday, May 12, 1996, by the Rev. W. Graham Smith, D.D.

### **MATTHEW 9:29**

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

### **THE MEANING OF “FAITH”**

I would like to begin the sermon this morning by addressing a few words to our friends who are with us today for the first time. First of all, let me say how gratified we are that you are worshipping with us. We trust that you will feel welcome and at home as you attend a church which has developed a reputation for being a loving, caring congregation of Christian people, where a visitor is never a stranger. We hope that if you are seeking a church home for yourselves and your children, you will find what you are looking for here at Faith Church.

Let me tell you a little about ourselves. We are a congregation of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church--a denomination that holds fast to the Bible as God's revealed and authoritative Word. All that we believe concerning faith and morals we find in Holy Scripture. The Bible is the bed-rock upon which we build the whole structure of our personal faith and of our united witness to the world.

Rather than go into detail regarding the history of our congregation, I would refer you to the insert in the bulletin which will tell you who we are, how our congregation was established, and what our goals for ministry really are.

I was personally delighted when, at the outset, our people chose the word “Faith” as the name of our Christian fellowship. Here was a group of Christians stepping out in faith, knowing not what the future might hold in store for them, but assured that our sovereign God would lead, protect, and empower them to praise and proclaim His name and to do His will, whatever the cost might be.

“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 Savior.

Here is a man in a small boat a mile up river from Niagara Falls. His outboard motor has malfunctioned, he has no oars in the boat, and he is drifting swiftly and inexorably to his doom. A man on the shore, seeing his plight, 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 imperiled 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 savior. Likewise, *faith* is the rope, the link, that unites us to Jesus Christ, our only and all-sufficient Savior.

In our New Testament reading 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!" At first 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, that their faith in Him was genuine, 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 God's transforming grace take place in these premises here on the hill of Kingstowne — Faith Presbyterian Church! And the Master is saying to each one of us:

"According to your faith will it be done to you!"

So let us each one 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?* At least 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, to follow in a new and complete commitment the 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 Christ, and starting out upon the road that leads to victorious Christian living. But faith also means forsaking our *own* goodness. You'd be amazed at how many non-Christians pride themselves on their own good living, reject the idea that they need a Savior, and are shocked and infuriated when the Bible 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 so unambiguously 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) that Jesus told about 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 it is still the custom for the parents of the bride to 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 sinfulness 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.

It means entering into a personal relationship with Jesus.

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, just as you are, in all your need, and reaching out your arms to Him and saying,

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

Have *you* embraced Jesus Christ like that? Have *you* by faith accepted Him into your life as your personal Savior from sin’s guilt and power? That’s what being a Christian 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. And the moment he looked down, he went down! (Matthew 14:22-33)

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 as a young congregation upon this fresh venture of faith--the construction of this beautiful edifice to the glory of God. And this presents us with additional challenges, and a 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 endeavor going to fly? Are we going to make it?” 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 Who Himself has conquered sin and death, He will inspire and nurture trust within your soul!

Feeling Afraid I Trust Him.

Faith can so unite us to our 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 rue on.  
O'er moor and fen, o'er crag and torrent till  
The night is gone...”

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

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 tempest, she said, “But my Daddy’s the captain, and I know he’s on the bridge right now. Everything will be all right!”

Feeling Afraid I Trust Him.

A few summers ago when we were on vacation in Ocean City, New Jersey, we heard Dr. Norman Vincent Peale preach to a crowded congregation in the great Ocean City Tabernacle. Dr. Peale was then in his 90th year and was preaching the Gospel with the same conviction and enthusiasm he had always demonstrated through the years. He told a story that caused quite a chuckle. Some months before, he had been 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 the 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. Finally, with a smile she said, “Dr. Peale, I could do this much more easily if you were lying down!”

Well, folks, as a lively, enthusiastic, Christ-honoring congregation of believers we’re not lying down, paralyzed by faithless fear. We’re on our feet, with our eyes firmly fixed upon Jesus, the Author and 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.

(3)     **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 on 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 statesman from Sri Lanka, used to say that "evangelism is one poor beggar telling another poor beggar where he can find bread." Evangelism is 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 invariably I 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 Him; 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 vibrant church in a strategic location to make our witness in this area where the Lord has placed us. Do you know that the Kingstowne community will soon have a population of 20,000 people? And if we get on with a concerted program of evangelism, God will bless us, and the church will grow with amazing rapidity. But the really great thing is that people will come to know Jesus! 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 here in our congregation who have been trained to lead people 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 ministry within Kingstowne, 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.**

St. John reminds us that “*this* is the victory that overcomes the world, even our *faith*” (1 John 5:4).

Thank God for Faith Evangelical Presbyterian Church!

**AMEN.**