

Pentecost 9                      8/10/25  
Hebrews 11:1-16              14C

***NOW FAITH IS THE ASSURANCE OF THINGS HOPED FOR, THE  
CONVICTION OF THINGS NOT SEEN.***

To say, “You have the memory of a goldfish,” was not exactly a compliment. Goldfish were known for their beautiful orange hues and terrible memories. You’ve seen a goldfish swim around and around in the fish bowl, right? Science told us that goldfish were thought to have a memory that lasted only a few seconds; so, every trip around the fish bowl was an entirely new venture. They remembered nothing of the last circle they made.

You know who has the memory of a goldfish? We do. We Christians do, especially when it comes to treasuring and trusting God’s promises. Look at the words we have heard read, *Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen (He 11:1)*. And we know what the Bible says, *We walk by faith, not by sight (2 Co 5:7)*. That’s right. Faith is not walking by sight; faith is walking with your ears! I know – you see with your eyes and hear with your ears. But faith is walking not by what your eyes see around you, at that moment in time, **FAITH** is walking by your ears -- hearing, learning, trusting in God’s Word of promise. But I don’t need to tell you, Dear Child of God, how hard it is to walk by faith, because you struggle with it every day of your earthly journey. As have Christians of every generation, of every age.

Look at our Old Testament lesson this morning. There, we see Father Abraham, the father of all Christian people, and what is he doing? Forgetting what God had promised him.

The Lord God had richly blessed Abram, as he was first known in the Bible. The Lord God called Abram away from his pagan homeland and made him a promise, saying,

*Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great so that you will be a blessing...and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed (Ge 12: 1-3).*

God blessed Abram with material possessions, livestock, and silver and gold.

Yet despite all of his blessings and his prosperity and his comforts, Abram feared. Did you catch the first words God spoke to Abram in our Old Testament lesson? *"Fear not!"* In spite of all the blessings the open hand of God had poured out on Abram, he was walking by fear instead of faith.

Abram's great fear was that he had no son, no heir. Look at his response to God's words, *"what will you give me, for I continue childless"* (Ge 15:2)? If he had a son, he could face old age without fear, knowing he had someone to take care of him.

But, much more than that, Abram wondered that without a son, an heir, would the promised Messiah ever come to save him from sin, death, and hell? Remember that when God first appeared to him and told him to go to the land of Canaan, the Lord God promised Abram that *"in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed"* (v. 3). Abram understood this promise of God. He understood that the promised Savior would come from his family line. But, how could that line continue, how could the Messiah come through Abram, if he had no son?

Abram doubted God, and doubt is unbelief. Abram already had the promise from God Himself of earthly wealth and land and a Savior to come from his own offspring. But, Abram, in his sinful weakness had the memory of a goldfish and needed continual assurance. He needed to be reminded again and again of God's promises. So, God comes again to him in our lesson, *"Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great"* (v. 1). And, God reminded him that a son from his own body would be his heir and through that son, the Messianic line would continue so that Abram's descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the sky.

Do you ever have the memory of a goldfish, especially when it comes to treasuring and trusting God's Word? Maybe I should ask the question this way: Do you always walk by faith? Or, do the cares and concerns of today make you forget God's promises?

You know God's promises to you in His Word:

- *For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope (Je 29:11).*
- *Be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven (Mt 9:2).*
- *Because I live, you also will live (Jn 14:19).*
- *"I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Mt 28:20).*
- *And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good (Ro 8:28).*

The PROBLEM we little lambs have in this valley of the shadow of death is that we find ourselves walking by sight, and not walking by our ears -- listening and hearing and trusting in God's promises.

Jesus said it this way in our Gospel reading, *"For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Lk 12:34)*. No matter what that treasure is -- whatever your eyes see and desire at that moment in time -- money,

land, sex, food, popularity -- there your heart will be also. And, when we love the things of this world more than Jesus, when we turn our heart from treasuring Christ above all things, we end up like Abram, walking by fear.

The GOOD NEWS for us is that in the midst of our unbelief and doubt, the voice of Jesus says, *“Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s pleasure to give you the kingdom”* (v. 32). Did you catch the words of Jesus? **“Give.”** Heaven, where God will wipe all the tears from our eyes, is not earned by our efforts; it is not a reward for what we have done or not done. God gives us eternal life in the kingdom of heaven as a gift.

God kept His promise. A son was born. And his mother wrapped Him in swaddling cloths and laid Him in a manger in Bethlehem. Thirty years later, He was baptized, and those baptismal waters washed upon Him all your fears, all your doubts, all your sin, even the sin of not hearing, learning, and trusting God’s Word. Isaiah the Prophet says it this way, *Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows (53:4-5).*

I shared with you that in June I attended a continuing education class on Herman Sasse. I share with you a great quote from Dr. Sasse, “Only the real God can take up the burden of your life, never an imaginary god” (*Witness: Erlangen Sermons and Essays for the Church 1933-1944, 94*). Jesus took all your worries, all your suffering, all the hurt of your soul, all the despair in your life; He took it upon Himself as He went to Golgotha and died for you there. Because He died for the wages of your sin, you are forgiven. And because He rose victorious Easter morning, you are victorious over sin, death, and hell.

Just as He did Abram, God has called you, Dear Child. In the new birth of your baptism, God called you out of the pagan land of sin and worry and fear and doubt to a new land, a land filled with the fruit of the Gospel.

In that washing of regeneration and new birth, God the Holy Spirit drowns out sinful flesh with its loved of worldly pleasure and property and works faith in us, so that we do walk by faith in the promises of God's Word.

When Abram needed constant reassurance, God gave it! *"Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great."* Because you need constant reassurance, God continually speaks His Word to in the forgiveness of your sins, and in His own life-giving Body and Blood.

You will recall a few moments ago, I accused you of having the memory of a goldfish. That, My Friends in Christ, was truly a compliment. You see, goldfish were thought to have bad memories, but modern science, with brain scans and things, now tells us goldfish have excellent, outstanding memories, that can last even years. I point that out to you because as you struggle under the cross of fears, and worry, and doubt, God gives you that comforting message, "Fear not, Dear Christian. I am your shield, your reward shall be very great." And, your ears hear it, trust in it, and treasure it.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.