

Faith

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[0 : 01] Our Father, we ask now as we turn to your word that you would speak to us. Give us that meekness and humility we need to listen. And send your Holy Spirit that we may believe these words so that we too may be counted amongst those who believe.

And we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Did any of you graduate this week?

And if so, would you indicate that by raising your right hand? I can't believe there's only one, but we're very proud of you anyway.

You did well. Thank you. Have any of you been married in the last year? Could you raise your hands, please?

Okay. Well done. Any of you planning to get married in the next year? All right, that's fine.

[1 : 10] I want just to... Sitting as I often do back along here or over in the corner, I often wonder who you are and what's happening in your lives.

And so I thought I would try and start by finding out one or two things, but I found out very little. I received a letter this week which was a great help to me.

It was from somebody that might be sitting there tonight, but I'm almost certain is not. Someone whose appearance by reason of the clothes she wears, the earrings, the bracelets, the makeup, the hairdo would be a very striking person if you saw her, and with an absolutely impassive face so that she would not have any idea what was going on behind her impassiveness.

I have had opportunity on several occasions to talk to her about baptism, which she's considered, but so far rejected. But she's a very intelligent person, and I have delighted in talking to her.

And she's moving towards some kind of goal. And I want to read you part of her letter. She says, remember me.

[2 : 38] I've moved out of the city. I'm in a cottage by a lake, and it's ours. That is, it belongs to my boyfriend and me.

And she says that she has every reason to be happy and feels very lucky. But, and she says, I bet you knew there was going to be a but.

I guess deep down, I thought the house would have a husband and children in it. So when we signed the papers, I was happy.

But there was something missing. Example, biting into a solid chocolate bunny and finding it hollow. Better example, giving a sermon in an empty church. Your heart will be into it, but you want the hearts of others to make the sermon full and have it feel shared.

[3 : 43] She then speaks about the realities of her dog and the spiders that live there, and about her boyfriend.

He comes from a very Christian family. He lives with his brother in another town, and we go to church every few months.

But when we go, he usually wants to go to his church. I don't think denomination is as important as what you feel inside.

Going back to my thoughts, I think that men these days, no matter how nice, are afraid of commitment. Have you ever done a sermon on that subject?

I don't know. I don't know. I don't know. I don't know. And if you have, could you drop me a line?

[4 : 56] We've been seeing each other for several years. We have a house together. We have a very slow but growing income.

We have animals together. Sometimes we have Christ together, not often. He says one day he will get back into it, that is, back into Christian faith.

And what he means by that is that when he gets married, I can only hope that day will come before we both go on retirement or kick the bucket.

I think that if we were to die now, Christ would judge us purely. I used to mention marriage, but I've given up.

God, please pray for us. Well, she and her friend are all messed up about marriage.

[6 : 05] And what I want to tell you is that I think that probably many of you are all messed up about marriage. That is, in the sexual revolution that has taken place, the cornerstone of our sexuality, which is meant to be heterosexual monogamy.

That's not a disease, actually. That we have difficulty with it.

And, but still, and this summer in an abundant way, couples are pouring down the aisle virtually, every Saturday, to be married.

And I want to tell you what happens when they get married, because it's pretty interesting.

If you were to take this little purple book, or maroon book, which is in your pews, and turn to page 564, you will see in the introduction to the service, that about six or seven lines down, matrimony was instituted of God in the time of man's innocency.

[7 : 55] So that every culture and every society and every part of the world has some ritual which surrounds the relationship between a man and a woman and the procreation and nurturing of children.

And I suspect that it says that it was established in the time of man's innocency to remind us that marriage is not a result of the fall, which our society seems to think it is.

But marriage preceded the fall. And therefore, it's not inconceivable that marriage is meant to give us a taste, at least, of that relationship which exists between man and woman and God in the Garden of Eden.

So it comes from a very high place in the whole history of the human race. If you look in the next paragraph, you'll see the three things which marriage is meant to establish.

They are the hallowing of the union between men and women. In other words, that union is not a casual union.

[9 : 25] It's not a temporary union. It is a holy union. And in the days when the prayer book was a little more crude than it is at the moment, it says, the hallowing of the union between men and women so that that union would not be like brute beasts that have no understanding.

You can see the raw head of sexuality coming out there. So that's the first reason is for the hallowing of the union. And you may find it interesting to contemplate that one of the differences throughout most of this century was that the Anglican Church said the first reason for marriage is the hallowing of the union between a man and a woman, that it would be a holy union.

And the second reason is the procreation of children. And the Roman Catholic Church has maintained that the first reason for marriage is the procreation of children.

And that's why the Roman Catholic Church has fought long and bitterly on the subject of contraceptives and so on, since the fundamental reason, the primary reason for marriage is the procreation of children.

So it's something just to think about. The hallowing of the union, the procreation of children, and thirdly, the mutual society, help and comfort that the one ought to have of the other.

[11 : 13] In other words, it's to be a lifelong relationship. And what you can hear in the letter that I read to you, that though there is an association, there is a house in the country, there is a lake, there is everything that might be the setting for an idyllic marriage, there isn't the ongoing mutual society, help and comfort that a commitment to marriage might give them.

So those are the three things that are part of, that marriage finds its purpose in. The next thing that happens in a marriage is you ask John, do you take Mary to be your wedded wife?

And that is probably, in our particular society and culture, one of the few decisions you have to make and that nobody makes it for you.

And one of the things I like to think is that when people are asked the question, do you take John or do you take Mary, that there is the possibility that that question has not already been answered.

That they are coming and before all their friends and all their society, they are saying, yes, I do. I will take this person. So it's one of the few really important choices you make in your life and one of the profound realities of being a human being is that you make choices.

[13 : 04] And obviously, a lot of you, I suspect, are not making choices. You tend to go with the flow.

And leave yourself in the position where perhaps you never will be able to make a choice. The next thing that it says, when they exchange their vows to him and to her, will you keep yourself only unto her so long as you both shall live?

And will you keep yourself only unto him so long as you both shall live? And you'll see that if you want on page 566 in this book, when they exchange vows.

And I think that Christian marriage has the understanding that you are to live your life in such a way that you keep yourself for that one who is to be your partner, both before and after the marriage. Now, in our culture, in our society, that's an impossible idealism. And, or it seems that way, but that's what you're asked.

[14 : 33] And that's what's implied in the relationship of marriage. You will then see that the vow ends with, to love and to cherish till death do us part.

And that is a commitment which wasn't made in this letter and which a lot of people don't want to make. One young couple came here with some marriage problems to talk to me and said when they got married somewhere back east, they were asked, they vowed to love and honour each other while love lasts, which in this case was about three and a half years.

And that's not what Christian marriage is. It's something that is to carry through till the end of your life. And so it is these things on which you are to build a marriage relationship.

And if you are in any way a serious disciple of Jesus Christ, then you should be planning on building that relationship.

The answer to human sexuality, from a scriptural point of view, is found in the building of a marriage.

[16 : 16] The preparation for it, covenanting into it, and maintaining it till while life lasts. Now, basically the reason I wanted to give you that illustration of marriage was because it's so contradictory to the ethos, to the culture, to the values, to the understanding that the society in which we live has.

And I tell you that because... You can pretty well, under the terms of the sexual revolution that we're going through, you can justify any type of sexual behaviour or misbehaviour.

There is... You can do anything and find grounds to justify it. And I tell you that because... Because I...

You know, I want you to see what it says in this book as being impractical, idealistic, and something that you need to avoid. Unless there is one condition which would enable you to accept this as being the goal of your life.

Let me just give a picture of who you are. Do you want to know who you are? This is who you are because you belong to the culture we all belong to. We have inherited the philosophy that we have inherited.

[17 : 52] The media speak in terms of this understanding of who we are. And Henry Nouwen in his book describes who we are.

What kind of people you are. And I thought of this a lot when I was thinking about you as a congregation in this church and why there seems to be a general reluctance to commitment. And this is why, at least from one person's point of view, listen to this definition of who you are as an individual. And of course, I live in the same world you do, so I believe this as part of the way I tend to think too.

Nuclear man or woman, the nuclear person is how he describes it. He no longer believes in anything that is always and everywhere true and valid.

He lives by the hour, creates his life on the spot. His art is a collage art, which, though a combination of divergent pieces, is a short impression of how a person feels at the moment.

[19 : 14] His music is an improvisation, which combines themes from various composers into something fresh as well as momentary.

His life often looks like a playful expression of feelings and ideas that need to be communicated and responded to, but which do not attempt to oblige anyone else.

And so that's how we live our life. A relationship for a weekend here, shacking up here, relating to one another for the moment, for the occasion, without any long-term commitment.

That kind of thing is the way we live our lives. Finding meaning in this experience, or meaning in this experience, or meaning in this temporary relationship, or meaning in this adventure, or trying to find something that gives at least momentary meaning to our life, because nothing can give it ultimate

meaning.

That's who we as a society are. And that's why I wanted to say all those things to you before I came to Hebrews 11, verse 1.

[20 : 37] Because the thing that turns our world upside down is Hebrews 11, verse 1. Turns that world upside down. And if you look at it, you will, I hope, see what I mean.

Hebrews 11, verse 1, Hebrews 11, verse 1, says that something brand new is introduced into our life.

Thank you very much. Here's to you. That's a help. Hebrews 11, verse 1 says, Faith is.

It's almost as though at the end of chapter 10, the question you're left with is, what is faith? And the answer comes out in chapter 11, verse 1, faith is.

And then he goes on to tell you what it is. And faith is the assurance of things hoped for. Now, the opposite of hope is despair.

[21 : 55] The meaning of hope is that somewhere down the line, somewhere in the future, there is a reality, and that reality is such a live option to me that I'm prepared to live my life with that hope which is there.

And that hope, I am told, has its reality in my present experience through the exercise of faith, so that faith is the reality of the things we hope for.

And that's why I don't think you can take the vows in the prayer book seriously unless you have such a hope. Otherwise, your sexual behavior, your interpersonal relationships will all derive out of the meaninglessness of the moment.

You know, that this isn't leading anywhere, it isn't going anywhere, it has no ultimate meaning. But once faith has given to you the awareness of the reality of the hope that you have, then your present behavior is to be, the way you will behave in the present is in the light of the substantial reality of that hope which is yours by faith.

You, uh, we live in a world that says, who cares? It doesn't matter. So what?

[23 : 30] Uh, you, uh, but when faith comes along, you then, uh, make a decision because you choose to obey the one you love and not understanding that decision fully, you have faith in the reality of the hope you may have been given.

Now, what that means is that our society would ridicule us as Christians for believing in the characteristics of marriage that are built into the marriage service.

life long, keep you only under her, uh, all those things would, are considered to be practically ridiculous by our society.

But you accept them because you have faith and a hope that God who calls you to that obedience will vindicate that obedience.

Do you follow me? Look at the world around you, see how you're to behave sexually, and find permission to do whatever you want to do in the world in which we live.

[24 : 51] It's all there for you. The option you have as a Christian is to determine that you will seek as far as you are able to be obedient to Jesus Christ who says, if you love me, you will obey the things I want you to do.

You will obey my commandments. And we obey them because faith assures us that through that course of obedience, God will vindicate our decision to be obedient.

It won't appear to you right now, here and now, to be practical, to make sense. It's not something you could discuss with your friends because they would scorn you for saying such things.

But that's why you would make such a decision because faith gives you in the present circumstances of your life an awareness of the substantial reality of the hope that you have in Christ.

What's the second thing it says? It says, faith is the reality, again, the substantiation of things not seen.

[26 : 08] Now, our world is completely upside down from the world that is described there. Our world is made up of things we see, touch, taste, hear, experience, right now.

That's it. That's our world. world. The car we drive, the cash we have in our pocket, the material reality of our world.

And faith turns that upside down and says, sorry, the reality of the things you see is something which lies invisible behind the things you see.

the reality is the substantiation of things you don't see. When I see you sitting in those hard wooden pews, you represent to me a substantial reality.

But behind you, there's a far more substantial reality, and that is, why has God got you there in the first place? And what does he mean to have happen to you by you being there? And you can deceive me totally as to what you're here for, as you can deceive one another.

[27 : 30] But faith makes you aware of the substantial reality of the things you can't see. And so by faith, you live in respect for things that you can't see.

And that, you see, puts us completely at odds with the society in which we live. Now, let me tell you two things that mess up faith for people in this generation.

One of them is that faith is considered the opposite of reason, and that the only person who would exercise faith is somebody who can't think very clearly about a given subject.

They can't work their way through to a logical, rational conclusion, so they take an enormous faith leap to do, to make a decision which they're not prepared to take the trouble of reasoning through. So that faith is treated in our culture as being the opposite of, or a substitute for reason. And so you hear lots of people tell you, I want reasons.

[28 : 43] I want a touch, I want a taste, I want a handle, I want it to have that kind of reality. But you see, what it's saying here is, and what the New Testament says consistently, is the opposite of faith is blindness.

That is, you can't see it until you have faith, and then you can see it. Faith is an alternative to not being able to see it.

faith. And so lots of times in counseling, when you're trying to help somebody deal with a problem, and they say, I can't see it, then you've got to pray with them and for them that they will be given the faith to see what they can't see about their own situation.

A lady wandered down this aisle yesterday or the day before, and said, is my boy gone to hell? Well, that's what she could see and what she could feel, but she needs help to see a reality which is beyond that.

She doesn't want somebody to reason with her. Her blindness has got to be relieved by the sight which faith gives. That's the first thing.

[30 : 07] The second way that faith has been corrupted for us is that we've been taught that if you believe hard enough, it will come to be, and that faith creates its own object.

If you believe and believe and believe and really concentrate on believing, and you really try to believe, then it'll happen. That's not what this says.

And the people who study the language says faith is commanded by its object.

We are, that we have to exercise faith because the object of our faith commands us to. That God grants us the faith to believe in him.

And it's the objective reality of God that forces us to acknowledge him. And you can hear the story of many great Christians who came to that point where they no longer could disbelieve because the one in whom they came to put their faith demanded that they do it.

[31 : 23] Well, I need to quit, but I want just to tie this together in this way. The next statement that you get to in Hebrews 11 is, by faith we understand that the world was created by the word of God, which is seen.

What is seen was made out of things which do not appear? And you see, that's the same effect, that the word of God, and the word of God can be translated as the action of God.

The world was created by God so that the reality which we know as our world is the result of the unseen activity of God.

So that when you look at creation, which you can see with your eyes, the eyes of faith will tell you that that creation gives expression to someone you can't see who is the God who created it.

And when you read your morning paper and you see the complete mishmash of contemporary history and say, where is their meaning? The meaning derives from the word of God.

[32 : 58] And when you look at marriage and you say, why should anybody commit themselves to that kind of relationship? And the answer is, because that is in accordance with the word of God.

God, that's why. And you may not fully understand it. You may not be able to provide the reasons, but by faith you are given to understand that the world in which you live was put together in response to the unseen reality of the word of God.

God. And so when you're making the kind of relationship that you, that could lead to marriage, or developing a marriage which already exists, what you are trying to do is in that visible relationship to understand the underlying obedience, which is based on the reality that you have by faith in God's primary and unseen activity.

That's what it means. When you come, as you will tonight, to partake of the Holy Communion, you will be given bread and wine.

You'll see them. You'll touch them. They will be in your hands and on your lips. they will have substantial reality.

[34 : 45] And they are given to you as one who believes in Jesus Christ, as one who has faith in Jesus Christ. They are given to you as one who is a disciple of Jesus Christ.

And having that, that you can see in your hands, taste and touch with your hands, you see beyond that to the unseen reality that this Christ who died for you has risen again and he is Lord.

And in that relationship, your faith becomes the substance of all you could hope for and more. are. Your faith takes that which you can see and sees beyond it to the Lordship of Christ, his resurrection and his glory, which he wants you to share in.

And that the function of your life is to live by that faith and with the understanding that that faith gives you. Amen.

[36 : 00] For our intercessory prayers, please take hold of the green alternative services book which you will find in the middle of the pew.

The alternative services book page 126. And if you would kneel please.

Thank you. Thank you. please. Please respond with the darker print.

In peace we pray to you Lord God. For all people in their daily life and work.

For our families, friends and neighbors, and for all those who are alone. For this community, our country, and the world.

[37 : 47] For all who work are for justice, freedom, and peace. For the just and proper use of your creation.

For freedom, honor, fear, justice, and creation. For all who are in danger, sorrow, or any kind of trouble.

For those who need to get sick, and rest in need. At this time I will pray for some local concerns. And if you have any on your heart, please pray for them from the pew.

Lord, we give you thanks for those people who are in Russia at this moment. On the Campus Crusade, Here's Life Project. They are there for 30 days.

They leave this Thursday. They are Julie Hagel, Wendy Ray, and Karen Dreiger. Lord, we also lift up to you some members of this congregation who have health concerns.

[39 : 02] We pray for Ben. We pray for Peter Kidd. For all those that you have in your own hearts, I take a few moments.

returning to the prayer book. For the peace and unity of the Church of God, I lift up to you also St. Chad's and the J-Team for the mission that's being done this week. For our bishop and for all bishops and other ministers. And in concluding, we turn over to page 132, keeping in mind the substantial reality behind the things that we see that faith gives us.

Number 13, remain together. Remain with us, Lord, for the day is far spent and the evening is at hand.

Kindle our hearts on our way, that we may recognize you in the scriptures and in the breaking of bread. Grant this for the sake of your love. Amen.

[40 : 49] As we remain kneeling, let us turn in the Lilac Book to page 5. I'd share with the people around you.

Down the bottom of page 5, let us humbly confess our sins to Almighty God. Almighty God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, maker of all things and judge of all men, we acknowledge and confess our manifold sins and wickedness, which we from time to time most grievously have committed by thought, word, and deed against Thy divine majesty.

We do earnestly repent and are heartily sorry for these, our misdoings. Have mercy on us, most merciful Father, for Thy Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, forgive us all that is past.

God, we hear, serve and please Thee in newness of life, to the honour of you. Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Amen. Hear what comfortable words our Saviour Christ saith unto all that truly turn to him, come unto me all that labour and are heavy laden and I will refresh you.

[42 : 15] God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son to the end that all believe in him should not perish but have eternal life. Hear also what St.

Paul saith, this is a true saying and worthy of all to be received, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. If anyone sins, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and he is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

Almighty God, our heavenly Father, who of his great mercy hath promised forgiveness of sins to all them that with hearty repentance and true faith, turn unto him, have mercy upon you, pardon and deliver you from all your sins, confirm and strengthen you in all goodness, and bring you to everlasting life, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen. Would you stand please? The peace of the Lord be always with you. Let's greet one another in the name of the Lord.

Those round about us. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[43 : 40] Amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Praise him!

The everlasting King. Praise Him for His grace and favor, To our fathers in this cross.

[45 : 46] Praise Him still the same forever, Slow to give and swift to pass, Praise Him, praise Him, praise Him, Praise Him, praise Him, praise Him, praise Him, Praise Him, praise Him, Glorious in His faithfulness.

Father, like He turns and spares us, My■ Listen.