



In the Hands of the Refiner

The Challenge of Faith

I believe there may be several challenges we could face in our lives regarding faith. The challenges come when there is a crisis in our lives, like when we lose our employment, a loved one, or experience illness. In addition, there is the challenge to contest for the Faith once delivered unto the saints. There is the challenge of self-mastery, dealing with our passions, our sins, our fragile nature, and self-understanding. There is the challenge of accepting sin, sickness, old age, and death. Each of these life challenges can be met with faith. We will discover how faith is used against these challenges in this chapter.

To begin understanding the different challenges of faith, we must understand how by faith we come to understand what is behind these challenges. Hebrews 11: 1 says, "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." In some sense, this passage of Scripture is saying that faith is the confident assurance that what we hope for is going to happen. Yet, for instance, how do we reconcile the terminal illness of a loved one, or their death? If we pray in faith that they recover or if we pray in faith that they not die, and they do not recover and they do die – what does that make of my faith? Does that mean we have not met the challenge to believe God in those situations? Sickness and death are realities of this mortal life we live. How can faith assure me during these trying times? How can I know that God is there and that He really cares for my loved ones and me?

Faith acknowledges as reality what is not made plain to the senses – to what we taste, touch, see, hear, and smell. Faith is based upon that fact, acts on it, and is supported by it even when everything we experience seems to deny it. Faith actualizes what we see. This is how the unseen virtues of hope can be visualized. Faith gives what we are hoping for a substantial nature. In times of weakness, it brings us strength. In times of sadness, it brings us joy. Even in the times when we do not feel strong or feel joy, we have the inner conviction we will be strengthened and we will become happy. Faith helps us get an impermeable grasp on what is happening!

St. John Chrysostom says in his Homily XXI on Hebrews X, 1 B #58, p. 465, "Faith needs a generous and vigorous soul, and one rising above all things of sense, and passing beyond the weakness of human reasoning." God gives us His grace as strength! God's joy is our strength! For it is written in Nehemiah 8:10, "Then he said to them, "Go your way, eat the fat, drink the sweet, and send portions to those for whom nothing is prepared; for *this* day is holy to our Lord. Do not sorrow, for the joy of the LORD is your strength." Therefore, faith turns our sorrow into joy, and our weaknesses into strengths. Faith assures us that God is there. Faith assures us of the unseen presence of God, even if we do not feel His presence. Because we must remember that faith sees the unseen. Faith is the conviction of what we cannot feel with our senses at the time.

This IS the challenge of faith – the challenge of believing God! How we believe God is how we will respond to the challenges, we face in our lives. This is not a matter of "I have more faith than you." It is a matter of how we come to understand who we are in our relationship to God. God WILL reveal Himself to us in these challenges. How we manage, our faith will determine that reality. Real faith is based upon our understanding. We must understand initially that within God and faith there is mystery. We cannot put it into human terms or experience what ultimately cannot be expressed. Mystery comes from the Greek word "mysterion". The root of this Greek word is "myein" which means "to contemplate." Therefore, within God and faith there is mystery of such profound depth and meaning that they cannot be understood by the human mind. This, once again, is the challenge of faith – the challenge to believe God! St. Gregory of Nyssa said in his book "Life of Moses," "Every concept formed by the intellect to comprehend and circumscribe the divine nature can succeed only in fashioning an idol, not to making God known." With this in mind, let us take the next step in understanding the challenges of faith.

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Hebrews 12:1 states, “Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares *us*, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.” It must be said that in the challenge of faith, we must put aside everything that will hinder us, bring us down, make us sick, and make us lose sight of the prize. Runners and cyclists who run or ride for miles to win their race all want to be in the best condition possible. In order to climb a mountain or hill, someone who is strong and light will be able to conquer that climb the best. A runner, who is fat, has to work twice as hard as someone who is slim and strong. Poor self-esteem, lack of prayer, sin that has not been dealt with, and other problems can weigh us down in the contest of faith. If there is anything that can weigh us down, we must find out what it is and remove it so we can continue on to victory in the challenge of faith. We must be lean, clean, and strong faith machines!

Earlier I said that faith is the confident assurance that what we hope for is going to happen. Faith is the evidence or proof of things we cannot yet see. Faith is the conviction of their reality or faith perceives these things as real fact when that thing is not yet revealed. Faith trusts in, and relies upon God. Faith is taking God at His Word. Faith and belief are almost the same. Faith is an action word. Faith is a verb and belief is a noun. Remember one thing; God does not sell articles of belief! Belief is the result of faith. Belief is the result of the action taken by faith in God. Belief is the verbal statement of that faith. Faith is a positive action word. In Holy Scripture, we are told that faith without action is dead. Therefore, a Christian is one who speaks the Word of God. A Christian is one who verbally testifies to their faith. A Christian acts on faith. Faith is a gift from God. Every Christian has been given a measure of faith.

The faith God gives is not the same kind of faith you have when you make a deal, and agree to do business in “good faith.” The faith God gives is an enabling to believe God and take Him at His Word. Ephesians 2:8 says, “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God.” Christians are people of confession. Even though we can struggle through faith, God says that the more hopeless our circumstances, the more likely our salvation! Faith never quits when the darkness of trouble comes along. The darker the room, we see with the eyes of faith a greater need for light. Even in the darkness, with great trouble and care, the more genuine are our prayers. God’s help is always near and always available, we must see that through faith!

There is a battle going on right now within each of us. It is the battle for faith. We must understand that we battle against evil, and against ourselves. We are challenged daily to live moral and ethical lives. We are challenged to live in a right relationship with our friends, co-workers, and family. We are challenged to live in a right relationship spiritually with God. We are to take hold of, to seize upon, and take possession of the faith that God has given us. God has given us weapons for our warfare. We must learn how to use them. We must learn to use them through faith.

The Apostle Paul describes these weapons in his letter to the Ephesians, “Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.” (Ephesians 6:14-17) The Sword of the Spirit is an offensive weapon, as a two-edged sword, sharp on both sides, the Word of God is meant to cut deep into the “dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow,” it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Each weapon we use requires a certain technique with which to use it. We must fight using the weapons of our warfare with skillful expertise, to destroy the negativity of sin and to conquer the self. We must “pray in the Holy Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayer and requests.” We tighten our belt of truth by reading, studying, and meditating upon the Holy Scriptures. God’s Word is truth. We must actualize the breastplate of righteousness – the fact that we have been made holy by the righteousness of Christ in us through the Holy Spirit. We must wear the shoes, which make us stand firm, and in the ready stance to proclaim the Gospel of peace to those who know no peace. We must wear the helmet of salvation, which gives us the assurance of sins forgiven and a right to the inheritance of being sons and daughters in our relationship with God.

Christians are in a lifelong race. It is like an athletic event. I can identify the race or athletic event as a bicyclist. The challenge of faith is like a bike race. It depends upon your equipment, your physical conditioning, and how much food and water you have to nourish you throughout the contest. Technically, you have to make sure your tires are firm and full of air. Your brakes must work properly to stop you. Your front and rear derailleur must work correctly to shift into the gear you need to swiftly get up that hill, or stomp to the finish line in a sprint.

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You wear a helmet to protect your head if you crash, so you can carry on. You wear gloves to ensure your grip is firm on the handlebars. You must have ridden and trained enough miles and have the strength to succeed in the contest. If you do not, you will be dropped like a lead weight, left behind to mull over your loss. Nourishment is a key factor to winning races. Eating right and taking in the correct foods during a race keeps the energy levels up and will allow you to maintain a pace even when the going gets rough.

The challenge of faith, like a bike race, is based upon preparation and training. We must learn how to manage our faith. We must learn how to trust God. We learn these things by reading the Holy Scriptures, the Holy Fathers, and the teachings of the Church. We learn these things from others who have been through the challenges of faith. We learn these things by participating in the Holy Sacraments of the Church, through which we obtain knowledge of the divine and spiritual nourishment. The challenges of faith actually help us grow our faith. That is where we keep praying, keep hoping, keep loving, and keep running or riding the race with endurance and perseverance. We will continue to grow in holiness and will participate in the divine nature of God.

The Apostle Peter in his letter 2 Peter 1:2-11 tells us how faith grows, “Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that *pertain* to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption *that is* in the world through lust. Also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, *you will be* neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these things is short-sighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins. Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”

The ultimate prize we contend for in the challenge of faith is our salvation. That salvation is a present salvation and a future salvation. This present salvation is a struggle; we suffer, and endure great stress. Day after day, we seek that which was lost. We look in the highways and byways of our past; we shake the shrubs and hedges of our minds; we comb the fields of time for the life that is within us. We seek hope, life, happiness, and freedom. We can find all of these through faith. The challenge of faith is to contend in the battle for your soul. It is a fight that CAN be won. We must exert ourselves to the utmost, even though it may be costly and agonizing. We deny ourselves and at the same time give to ourselves in this competition, which we call life. This is the challenge – the challenge of faith. The challenge is to believe God when everyone and everything else points to hurt, pain, loss, envy, anxiety, helplessness, hopelessness, and depression. We can be victorious in the challenge of faith.

What is sad is that faith is so simple; yet can be hidden deep within us; circling within us, yet we do not notice. Jesus said that faith is like a mustard plant seed. These mustard seeds are very, very tiny, but produce a very large plant when properly fertilized, watered, and given plenty of sunlight. How does faith grow? Faith grows and its truth is confirmed by means of its spiritual fruits, which are only known through experience. Remember, faith goes beyond the senses, yet with the senses, faith is experienced. The Apostle Paul instructs us, saying, “*Examine yourselves, whether you are in the faith; prove it to yourself. Don’t you know within yourself, that Jesus Christ is in you?*” (2 Cor. 13:5). Faith can and must grow to become mature and lasting. It is this enduring, mature faith that can get us through the darkest times of our lives.

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WHERE YOU CAN FIND CLC’S WORSHIP SERVICES



Christ Lutheran Church Duluth



Christ Lutheran Church Duluth



Everyday is a blessing at Open Arms!

*Dear Friends of Christ Lutheran,
Praying that you are all doing well.*

2 Peter 5:7 "Cast all your cares on Him because He cares for you."

We temporarily closed the Daycare when the schools closed because of the virus. Since then I have been receiving sweet messages, cute pictures and even some darling videos from the families. We are all missing each other. It has been a blessing to hear from them. Most of the families are working from home and a few of the children are having fun staying with their Grandma's. We are all looking forward to many more fun times when the daycare reopens.

It's been a scary time and it's so easy to be fearful. We know that the Lord is with us always. He is protecting us and will always provide for our needs.

I recently heard a story about a little boy who was afraid of the dark. One day his mom asked him to get a can of tomato sauce from their pantry. He said, "I don't want to go in there mom, it's dark in there." She replied, "Don't be afraid, Jesus will be in there with you." After thinking about it for awhile, he cautiously walked towards the doorway of the dark pantry, he peeked into the dark room and said, "Jesus, would you please hand me a can of tomato sauce?"

Even during this time when we feel so fearful of the darkness and unknown of what's going on in the world we need to remind ourselves that Jesus is the light of the world. He is our helper and He will see us through this.

It's April and we don't know if we will be able to celebrate Easter together in church or if instead we will be celebrating the death and resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ online this year. Either way we are so blessed to know that because He lives we can face tomorrow. That is one of my favorite Easter songs. I also love He Arose and He is Risen by Glad. I hope you will sing them this year.

You are all in my prayers for protection and that you will feel our Lord's presence and peace everyday. Deuteronomy 31:8

My mom used to say this verse with my brother and sister and me when we were experiencing a troubling time. She would put our names in front of the verse. I hope you will try it too.

Your name... And the Lord He it is that goes before you, He will be with you, He will not fail you Neither forsake you. Fear not neither be dismayed.

Wishing you blessings and lots of love.

*Dear Christ Lutheran members & friends -
I want to thank you for all your prayers for me when I was in the hospital & nursing homes, also for Pastor DeSha and other friends' visits & many flowers & plants. It means so much when you see your friends come to see you.*

God bless you!

Love,

Carol Blair

*Thank
you!*

Dearly Beloved CLC Family,

As I write, I am relishing the recollection of your blessed faces traveling on a bus to Colorado, singing and laughing during VBS, worshiping together, enjoying coffee and treats together, doing Sunday and Wednesday Bible Study, gathering to pray, reading stories to the daycare kids, planning at council meetings, gathering with Esther, Dorcas, and Mary circles, sewing and quilting together for fun and charity, making Christmas cookies and pasties (preceded by the communal meat-cutting in the Sunday School room), and countless others.

What all of these common activities have in common is togetherness, and what was once common has now become rare and precious. So before you read on, stop for a minute, rest, and remember us together with me...

"I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart."

Philippians 1:3-7a



A NEW PROJECT

I had the privilege to meet via WEBEX last week with the **AALC Women of Life** leadership from across the country. We are preparing for General Convention in June with hope that this special gathering will take place. I am honored to be writing the 2020 W.O.L. Bible Study for the denomination and my topic is on prayer. Please pray for me that I will hear from the LORD about this study with love, truth, relevance, and accuracy that will result in a beautiful and well-organized study to bless the women in our denominational family. Someday soon, we will be able to join hands in prayer together again. I can't wait!

CLC LIGHTHOUSE YOUTH I am sending out by email the *Identity and Purpose in Christ* Bible Study so parents and students can do the study together at home until we are able to meet again.

Love and blessing in Christ Jesus!

Sue DeSha

320-815-1561 / suedesha@gmail.com

April Mission of the Month: The AALC
Confessing • Caring • Calling
We confess our faith. We care for one another.
We call others to faith in Christ.

All of our congregations are fortresses of safety in a post-Christian frontier. Each congregation is an outpost, carefully positioned as a haven, providing the protection of God’s Word and the sustenance of His Holy Sacraments.

Each congregation is a fortress, an outpost from which God’s people are sent forth with Christ’s commission of Kingdom expansion and Gospel proclamation into a wilderness culture of immorality and unbelief.

Each congregational fortress in The AALC is precious. Some of our congregations are very small and some are located in remote areas, yet each one is connected to Christ Jesus and to the rest of our Association. We stand together, committed to the care and support of our brothers and sisters.

We focus on Keeping the Fortress, but we also focus on Taking the Frontier!

“Taking the Frontier” includes everything from congregational outreach to church-wide overseas missions. The gift of the Gospel of Jesus Christ must never be hoarded as our own personal possession, but instead be shared with a world lost in spiritual poverty and eternal darkness. God is ever expanding The AALC by motivating ministers and multiplying ministries.

With all of this said, however, we know that our efforts of protection and expansion are fruitless without Him. Though He uses clay vessels like us, it is God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit who is Keeping the Fortress and Taking the Frontier. Hallelujah! Amen.

You may make checks payable to Christ Lutheran Church. Thank you for your continued support in our mission *“To know Christ and to make Him known.”*



Gary Lofald
April 5

Carol Schneeberger
April 6

Jim Maruska
April 10

Jillian Brula
April 10

Ethan Wiita
April 17

Richard Johnson
April 18

Don Olson
April 20

Priscilla Olson
April 27

Grace Wells
April 29

FINANCIAL UPDATE:

2020 Annual Budget: \$231,390; Weekly \$4,450; YTD need \$42,990

	<u>Offering</u>	<u>Other</u>	<u>Daycare</u>	<u>Total</u>
3/8/20	\$1,348	\$190	\$0	\$1,538
YTD	\$26,284	\$2,340	\$ 9,634	\$38,258

The Trustees and Treasurer are working together to manage finances until the major crisis is over and we can meet again. A reminder to send you offerings via mail by placing your offering envelope into one addressed to Christ Lutheran Church or write your envelope # in the memo line of your check; please do not send cash though the mail.

The office continues to be open regular hours if you want to drop off your offering at church. The Trustees will be counting as needed rather than weekly; your check may take longer to clear.

Full Financial reports are posted in the Narthex after each council meeting.

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Matthew 6:21

APRIL 2020

SUN

MON

TUE

WED

THU

FRI

SAT

Pastor's Day Off

Pastor's Day Off

<p><i>Finding Encouragement in God's Word</i> 30 Bible Readings for the month of April</p>			<p>1 <i>God's Glory</i> Psalm 8</p>	<p>2 <i>Bread of Life</i> John 6</p>	<p>3 <i>The Good Shepherd</i> John 10</p>	<p>4 <i>Parables</i> Matthew 13</p>
<p>5 9:30 AM Worship Service on Facebook 10:30 Drive-Thru Communion*</p>	<p>6 <i>Wisdom</i> Proverbs 3</p>	<p>7 <i>Messiah</i> Isaiah 53</p>	<p>8 <i>Protection</i> Psalm 91</p>	<p>9 <i>Confidence in Christ</i> Philippians 3</p>	<p>10 <i>God's Omniscience</i> Psalm 139</p>	<p>11 <i>Heaven</i> John 14</p>
<p>12 9:30 AM Worship Service on Facebook Prayer John 17</p>	<p>13 <i>Seeking the Lord</i> Isaiah 55</p>	<p>14 <i>Bearing Burdens</i> Galatians 6</p>	<p>15 <i>Love</i> 1 Corinthians 13</p>	<p>16 <i>Fruit of the Spirit</i> Galatians 5</p>	<p>17 <i>The Vine & The Branches</i> John 15</p>	<p>18 <i>Forgiveness</i> Psalm 32</p>
<p>19 9:30 AM Worship Service on Facebook Unity Ephesians 4</p>	<p>20 <i>The Tongue</i> James 3</p>	<p>21 <i>Overcomers</i> 2 Corinthians 4</p>	<p>22 <i>Knowledge</i> Proverbs 1</p>	<p>23 <i>The Deity of Christ</i> John 1</p>	<p>24 <i>Do Not Grow Weary</i> Hebrews 12</p>	<p>25 <i>Praise</i> Psalm 103</p>
<p>26 9:30 AM Worship Service on Facebook Praise Psalm 12</p>	<p>27 <i>Spiritual Warfare</i> Ephesians 6</p>	<p>28 <i>Creation</i> Genesis 1</p>	<p>29 <i>Dependence on God</i> Psalm 39</p>	<p>30 <i>Jesus is Coming</i> Revelation 22</p>		

***Please drive by back door to fellowship hall**

PLEASE PRAY FOR

Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord James 5:14

Our Pastor & the Leadership of the Church
The family of Shirley Kern
CLC Lighthouse & CLC Clubhouse- kids & leaders
All of our students from pre-school to college
Open Arms Daycare
Mission of the Month: The AALC

Our Country
Our Military & Police
The teachers and students at all schools
Persecuted Christians throughout the world
Piedmont Elementary
The steadfastness of our faith

THOSE WITH HEALTH NEEDS:

Bill & Jane McLean
Jean Sundstrom
Katie Lund
Susan Johnson
Judy Stocke
Carol Johnson
Carol Blair

Ruth Peterson
Ruth Dahl
Carol Schramm
Florence Kubiak
Evelyn Johnson
Bryan Goeppinger
Del Sandberg

Mark Malander
Diane Malander
Barb Hanson
Donna Swanson & Family
Darlene Saaf
Brian McDonald
Mary Jenny

Vi Boder
Marlene Stauber
Bob Johnson
Laura Melander
Lorna McLean
Dennis Peterson

If there is anyone who have been accidently overlooked, please contact the church office. We apologize for any oversights.