

**Australian Evangelical Lutheran Church**  
**BETHLEHEM TOOWOOMBA, OUR SAVIOUR LOWOOD, ST JOHN'S AUBIGNY,**  
**ST PAUL'S GREENWOOD, TRINITY MARBURG, TRINITY OAKEY**

7 August 2022

The 9<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

**HYMNS:** 305 200 14 620

**INTROIT:**

Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD, the people that He has chosen for His own inheritance.

The LORD looks down from heaven; He sees all the descendants of Adam.

From His dwelling place, He gazes upon all the inhabitants of the earth. The One who forms their hearts individually is the One who pays attention to all that they do.

No king is victorious because of a large army; no warrior saves himself by great strength.

A horse is a vain hope for deliverance; and its great strength will not save anyone.

Look, the eye of the LORD is on those who fear Him, on those who wait in hope for His mercy, to rescue their souls from death and to keep them alive during a famine.

Our souls have been waiting for the LORD ; He is our Help and our Shield. For in Him our hearts rejoice; for we have been trusting in His holy name. Let Your mercy, O LORD, be upon us, even as we wait in hope for You.

Psalm 33:12-22

**COLLECT:** Almighty and merciful God, it is by Your grace that we live as Your people, and offer You acceptable service. Grant that we may walk by faith, and not by sight, in the way that leads to eternal life; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

**READINGS:**

Genesis 15:1-6 Abram believed the LORD, and his faith was credited to him as righteousness.

Hebrews 11:1-16 Through faith Abraham obeyed.

Luke 12:22-40 Your heart will be where your treasure is.

**Genesis 15:1-6**

<sup>1</sup> After this, the Word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: “Do not be afraid, Abram! I am your Shield and your very great Reward.”

<sup>2</sup> Abram asked: “O Lord GOD, what will You give me? For I continue to be childless and the one who will become the heir of my household is Eliezer of Damascus.”

<sup>3</sup> Then Abram also said, “Look! You have given me no offspring and so a member of my household will be my heir.”

<sup>4</sup> Then the Word of the LORD came to him: “This man will not be your heir, but one who comes from your own body will be your heir.”

<sup>5</sup> He took Abram outside and said, “Look up at the sky and count the stars, if you can count them!”

He also told him, “Your offspring will be like them!”

<sup>6</sup> Abram believed the LORD, and He credited it to him as righteousness.

**Hebrews 11:1-16**

<sup>1</sup> Faith is the confident assurance of the things we hope for, the conviction about things that are not seen. <sup>2</sup> For by it the men of long ago were well attested. <sup>3</sup> By faith we understand that the universe has been created by the Word of God, so that what is seen has not been made from things that are visible.

<sup>4</sup> By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was approved as a righteous man, when God approved of his offerings and by faith he is still speaking, although he has died.

<sup>5</sup> By faith Enoch was taken away so that he would not see death and “he was not found, because God had taken him.” For, before he was taken away, he had this testimony, that he had pleased God. <sup>6</sup> Without faith it is impossible to please God. For he who comes to God must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly search for Him.

<sup>7</sup> By faith when God had warned Noah about the things that were not yet seen, he respected God and built an ark to save his family. By this faith he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes through faith.

<sup>8</sup> By faith, when Abraham was called to go away to a place that he would receive as an inheritance, he obeyed and went, although he did not know where he was going. <sup>9</sup> By faith he lived as a stranger in the Promised Land, as though it belonged to someone else. He lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise.

<sup>10</sup> For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose Architect and Maker is God.

<sup>11</sup> By faith Sarah herself also received the ability to conceive a child, even though she was barren and was past the age, because she considered Him faithful who had made the promise. <sup>12</sup> Therefore, descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as

countless as the sand on the seashore came from this one man, although he had been as good as dead.

<sup>13</sup> All these people died in faith. They did not receive what had been promised but saw them from far away and welcomed them. They also confessed that they were strangers and sojourners on the earth. <sup>14</sup> For those who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. <sup>15</sup> Indeed, if they were thinking of the country that they had left, they would have had an opportunity to return. <sup>16</sup> Instead, they were longing for a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God. For He has prepared a city for them.

### **Luke 12:22-40**

<sup>22</sup> Jesus said to His disciples: “Therefore, I tell you: Stop worrying about your lives, what you are to eat or about your bodies, what you are to wear! <sup>23</sup> For life is a greater thing than food, and the body is a greater thing than clothing. <sup>24</sup> Consider the ravens! They do not sow or reap. They have no storeroom or barn, and yet God feeds them. How much more valuable are you than the birds? <sup>25</sup> Which of you by worrying can add an hour to his length of life? <sup>26</sup> Therefore, if you cannot do even the smallest thing, why do you worry about the rest? <sup>27</sup> Consider how the lilies grow! They do not labour or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendour was dressed like one of these. <sup>28</sup> If that is how God clothes the grass, which is in the field today and tomorrow is thrown into an oven, how much more will He clothe you, O you of little faith! <sup>29</sup> You also, stop trying to get what you are to eat and what you are to drink and stop being anxious! <sup>30</sup> For all the nations of the world search for these things, but your Father knows that you need them. <sup>31</sup> Rather, be eager to have His kingdom! These things will be given to you as well.

<sup>32</sup> “Stop being afraid, little flock! For your Father has considered it good to give you the kingdom. <sup>33</sup> Sell your possessions and give to the poor! Make yourselves purses that do not wear out, a treasure that will never be used up, in heaven, where no thief comes near, and no moth destroys! <sup>34</sup> For your heart will also be where your treasure is.

<sup>35</sup> “Be dressed for action and have your lamps burning! <sup>36</sup> Be like people who are waiting for their master when he comes back from the wedding feast, so that, when he comes and knocks, they may immediately open the door for him! <sup>37</sup> Blessed are those slaves whom the master will find wide-awake when he comes! Truly, I tell you, he will dress himself for work, have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them. <sup>38</sup> If he comes even in the second watch or even in the third watch and finds them like that, blessed are they! <sup>39</sup> Be aware of this, that if the owner of a house had known at what hour the burglar was coming, he would not have allowed his house to be broken into! <sup>40</sup> You also, be ready! For the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not expect Him.”

**FAITH REALLY IS A MIRACLE**  
**Sermon for the 9<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost, 2022**  
**Genesis 15:1-6**

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is our First Reading from before, Genesis 15:1-6: <sup>1</sup> **After this, the Word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: “Do not be afraid, Abram! I am your Shield and your very great Reward.”**

<sup>2</sup> **Abram asked: “O Lord GOD, what will You give me? For I continue to be childless and the one who will become the heir of my household is Eliezer of Damascus.”**

<sup>3</sup> **Then Abram also said, “Look! You have given me no offspring and so a member of my household will be my heir.”**

<sup>4</sup> **Then the Word of the LORD came to him: “This man will not be your heir, but one who comes from your own body will be your heir.”**

<sup>5</sup> **He took Abram outside and said, “Look up at the sky and count the stars, if you can count them!”**

**He also told him, “Your offspring will be like them!”**

<sup>6</sup> **Abram believed the LORD, and He credited it to him as righteousness.**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

To have faith is amazing and, indeed, a free gift from God. In His Word, God has given us a very clear answer as to what is saving faith. He tells us that saving faith is specifically trust or confidence in Jesus as our Saviour from sin. It is the *trust* or *confidence* in Jesus our Saviour. It is a resting of the heart on Jesus and His promises of salvation. The writer to the Hebrews tells us, “*Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see*” (11:1).

While faith is trust or confidence, it must also have an *object* on which to rest. Just as a building will remain firm only when it is built on a firm foundation, so also faith saves only when it rests on Jesus and the promises He makes in the

gospel. With the Apostle Paul, we proclaim, “*It is also no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. The life that I now live in my body I live by faith in the Son of God, who has loved me and given Himself for me*” (Galatians 2:20).

Having established what saving faith is, if you stop and think about all the things that work against faith, it’s amazing that any of us have it. To believe in the gospel of Jesus Christ and all that that involves, to trust in the goodness and the promises of God, despite all that would cause us to not believe - it’s simply amazing. Faith really is a miracle.

Consider our First Reading for today, from Genesis 15. It relates a portion of the story of Abraham - or Abram, as he was still called at that point. In the Bible, Abraham is often portrayed as “the father of faith,” the prime model of someone who trusted in God’s promises. “**Abram believed the LORD, and He credited it to him as righteousness.**” Righteousness is nothing else than believing God when He makes a promise. Likewise, in today’s Second Reading, from Hebrews 11, Abraham is called forward as the man of faith. We are told that “*By faith, when Abraham was called to go away to a place that he would receive as an inheritance, he obeyed and went, although he did not know where he was going*” (v. 8) and so on. The promised land, the promise of a multitude of descendants as many as the stars in the sky - these promises Abraham believed. That’s faith, and that’s why Abraham is set forward as a prime model for us.

But think about all that was working *against* Abraham’s faith. To begin with, going back to Genesis 12, the Lord God had called him out of the blue and told him to go to a land he had never seen, a land far, far away. What’s more, the Lord had also told him how He would make of him *a great nation*. But at that point, Abraham didn’t have any children, let alone the makings of a great nation, and besides, he was an older man, and his wife, Sarah, was well past childbearing years. <sup>2</sup> **Abram asked: “O Lord GOD, what will You give me? For I continue to be childless and the one who will become the heir of my household is Eliezer of Damascus.”** <sup>3</sup> **Then Abram also said, “Look! You have given me no offspring and so a member of my household will be my heir.”** It looked like the deck was stacked against these crazy promises being fulfilled. Abraham also had to wait for many years after the initial promise before he and his wife had a child.

Humanly speaking, there's no way Abraham should have believed these wild, grandiose promises. In fact, from time to time he did have his doubts. He lost patience with God and tried to take matters into his own hands to get what he was looking for. Does that sound familiar? It should! After all, how many times do we get tired of trusting in God to come through for us?

But somehow, the Lord restored Abraham when he faltered and kept him in the faith. This is what we mean when we speak of how faith is a miracle. It takes a miracle, both to have faith in the first place and then to remain in that faith, despite the obstacles. It takes a miracle because faith in God's promises is not just a matter of "humanly speaking." Really, it's a matter of *God speaking*, and that makes all the difference.

There are so many obstacles to faith working against us. Think about the believers mentioned in Hebrews 11. Take Abel as one example. "*By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was approved as a righteous man, when God approved of his offerings and by faith he is still speaking, although he has died.*" We all know the account of Abel and his brother Cain. Abel had faith in the unseen promises of God about the coming Saviour, and his actions showed it. He trusted God, but where did this get him? He was murdered for it. He was betrayed by a member of his own family! Life is not always easy for people who have faith in God. In fact, it can be very difficult or downright dangerous. Persecution, suffering for the sake of the gospel. These things can threaten our faith. We're tempted to think that God isn't looking out for us and that He doesn't care what happens to us. But God granted His approval by recording Abel's faith on the pages of Holy Scripture so that this first man who ever died could still speak to us today.

Faith is a difficult thing for so many reasons. Belief in Jesus Christ? How many of us here today have ever seen Jesus and yet believe He is the very Son of God come in the flesh - the same One who performed all those miracles mentioned in the Bible? The One whose crucifixion somehow covered the sins of the whole world and then rose from the dead on the third day? Tell me, when was the last time you saw someone rise from the dead? You see, this whole faith thing should be impossible. Yet we believe. We stake our lives, even our lives after death, on this Man, Jesus, whom none of us has ever met. Either it is a miracle, or else we

are all crazy, along with the millions and millions of other Christians who have believed the gospel and held the faith, despite all the things we haven't seen.

And what about all the times we haven't seen God come through for us in the way we hoped? When our world comes crashing down on us, and there's no magical happy ending, when the medical test results don't come back with good news, when you get laid off from work and can't find a decent-paying job, when your spouse leaves you, or when your child takes a wrong turn in life. *Where is God then?* No doubt, our faith can be severely tested, severely shaken.

Faith in God's goodness faces a tough challenge at times like these, and we must be honest about that. Putting on a happy face and pretending the problems don't exist won't cut it. Faith must be able to deal with these adverse realities.

What's the answer to these challenges to faith, these obstacles we all face, in one form or another? The answer comes in the very Word of promise that comes from God Himself. God's Word creates and sustains the faith it calls for. God's Word is alive and active.<sup>1</sup> It is dynamic and powerful. This is why faith is a miracle because it is God's doing, *from start to finish.*

When our faith is challenged - and it will be challenged, no question about it - when our faith is challenged and tested, what we need then is more of God's Word. We need more gospel. This is what will enable us to face those tests and come out with our faith still intact, perhaps *even stronger.*

Faith is a miracle. For most of us, that miracle started in our baptism. There at the baptismal font, God put His name on us and made us His children. He put His claim on us and took us for His own. There in the baptismal waters, Christ's holy blood washed away our sins. The Holy Spirit was given to us, the Spirit who creates and nourishes saving faith in us and keep us in the one true faith our whole life long. I am sure that none of us here today could ever remember a time when we did not believe two things: 1) The Bible is God's Word, and 2) Jesus is my Saviour. God's gospel promise, delivered in Holy Baptism, does the job. It works. It works faith in the Christian believer, sustained by an ongoing life in Word and Sacrament.

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<sup>1</sup> Hebrews 4:12

What is this faith? It is not just a mere intellectual belief that there is some sort of a Higher Power up there. That is not saving faith. No, faith, biblically speaking, is much more specific and substantial than that. When we're talking about faith, we're talking about faith in the one true God - the triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who has revealed Himself to us in Holy Scripture, in the preaching and teaching of the gospel.

This gospel faith is focused on the person and work of Jesus Christ, who reveals the Father's heart of mercy to us - Jesus Christ, whom the Holy Spirit bears witness to and glorifies. This Jesus Christ is indeed the very Son of God; the only Saviour sent from heaven. He is our Saviour, the One who has come to rescue us from sin and death and to give us forgiveness and everlasting life in their place. Jesus has done this by going to a cross for us, shedding His blood for us, that we might have these gifts. Jesus has done this for us by rising from the dead, showing the power of His victory, which will be our victory also, on the day when Christ returns and raises us to eternal life. These gifts are ours by grace. Receive them by faith. Faith takes hold of the promises of God, and all these promises are wrapped up in Christ.

Now with this gift of faith, we shall be able to make it through all the challenges and obstacles we face in life. In spite of all the adversities and the setbacks and let-downs and the "*How come all this bad stuff is happening to me?*" - in spite of all that, our faith in God's goodness will not be destroyed. Tested, yes, but not destroyed. We know that God is for us and with us, even when it doesn't look like it. The ultimate proof is in the cross of Christ. This is the one thing we can hold on to when everything else is falling apart.

The miracle of faith is a miracle because it is all God's doing - God working this faith in us through His powerful, dynamic Word. This faith in Christ, our Saviour, will see us through every obstacle we shall face in life and on into the life to come.

Dear friends, praise God for His mighty work of giving us faith and keeping us in it! Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

**PRAYER FOR THE NINTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**

Heavenly Father, we rejoice to remember Your constant love, and we join Your Church everywhere to praise Your glorious name. We thank You that Your Spirit has made us Your adopted children in Jesus Christ, so that we may truly know You as our Father, call on You confidently in prayer, and know that You will hear us.

We pray for all believers in the family of the Church. Preserve Your remnant of grace. Give Your flock shepherds whom Your Spirit teaches and leads, and who earnestly proclaim Your pure Word of life. Grant that they may lovingly feed Your sheep with Your Word, and strive to protect them from all error. Rescue Your Church from the dangerous lies of all false shepherds, so that Your children may be linked together in love, may stand firm in a common purpose and may work together to spread the Gospel.

Show Your glory and power to the nations, O God. Turn those in authority whose eyes are spiritually blind to Your light, and from the power of Satan to Christ, so that they may possess the forgiveness of sins and a place among the children of God. Look with favour on our country, that liberty, justice, and high morals may hold sway, and destroy all ungodliness and evil influences.

Heavenly Father, let Your Spirit fill our homes. Let the word of Christ in all its richness live in the hearts of children, and enable all parents to be proper examples of Christian faith and life. Protect our families in every storm of life, and keep them from all evil.

Since You have sent Your Son into the world so that no one may die in His sins, keep us pure in a corrupt and sinful world, so that we may finally obtain the crown of life. Teach us to know better what You want for us, let us yield a rich harvest of godly deeds, make us able to stand firm in the faith. Help us to put to death the desires of our sinful nature, and to live in the Spirit, as those who will one day enjoy all that You have promised.

Heavenly Father, the source of all holy desires, wise plans, and right actions, give Your peace to all, especially to those who are facing pain, sickness, mental agony, spiritual distress, or any other burden of body or soul. Assure them of Your love and mercy, that they may place themselves in Your care, and receive from You everything they need for their lasting good.

Loving Father, You have invited us to bring our requests before You with thanks. Therefore accept these prayers in the name of Jesus Christ, our Saviour. Amen.

## Article: Once Saved, Always Saved?

A question frequently asked is, “Can a person fall from faith?” What about the phrase heard in some circles, “Once saved, always saved”?

The “once saved, always saved” idea stems from the false notion that God’s grace is irresistible and that therefore a real believer can never fall away. But God’s grace is not irresistible. Just as it can be and is resisted by those who hear the gospel but never believe, so also those who once believed may turn back again to unbelief and perish. It is exactly for that reason that the Bible urges us constantly to be on guard, to stay close to the Word of God, to arm ourselves with it, to struggle against the enemies of faith outside and inside of ourselves (Romans 13:8-14; 1 Corinthians 15:58; 2 Corinthians 13:5; Ephesians 5,6). If it were true that one cannot fall from faith, then all of these pleas from the Bible would be pointless.

Indeed, the “once saved, always saved” error pushes people in the direction of what is called carnal security, that is, the evil notion that it makes no difference what they do - they are still saved. That is a self-righteousness of a particularly vile sort. Another person, plagued by temptations that require constant struggle, may be driven to despair; he concludes that if he were *really saved, really believed*, he wouldn’t have all these difficulties, and so he gives up. Many Scriptural passages make it clear that Jesus does not want us to use His grace and forgiveness as a license to sin. Nor does He want us to despair because of the struggle that He promised we would have as part of the Christian life (Mark 8:34-38). Rather, He calls us to faith by the gospel, and through the gospel gives us the strength to remain in saving faith, faith which will be lost if we depart from the gospel. It is like the man who wants to stay healthy and live; if the man refuses to use the means at hand for staying healthy, he will get sick and die. So too the Christian; the gospel brought him to faith and only the gospel can keep him in faith. If he spurns the gospel, the faith that he once had will die. Jesus says as much in the great parable of the Sower and the seed. Many receive the Word with joy but then allow the plant of faith to shrivel, wither, be choked, and die (Mark 4:3-20). Only the renewed message of the gospel can bring such a person back to faith again, that is, convert him again with a renewed sowing of the seed of the Word.

Thus, all three happen: Some never believe the gospel because of their own rejection of it; some believe it for a time and then fall from faith; some fall from faith and then are converted again. Indeed, many will attest that this last, this reconversion, has happened to them many times as they struggled and fell, rose again to the struggle, fell again and were again revived by the gospel. We want neither the false security that leads to lazy Christianity nor the despair that gives up in the struggle.

So while faith is altogether the gift of God in the gospel and remains always and alone His gift, the Christian with that gift applies himself to the spiritual food God gives in Word and Sacrament. By that food the Christian received spiritual life in the first place. And by the continual use of that same food God preserves the spiritual life, the faith that He created. We see then how the organs of the soul in the Christian function: The emotions are as the psalmist says, glad to go into the house of the Lord to hear His Word (Psalm 122:1). Reason grasps from that Word that it is by the nourishment of the gospel that faith is preserved. The will responds with the choice of hearing God's Word faithfully. Consequently, there is this constant interplay between the old will, reason, and emotions and the new, as the old frustrates and hinders the new and as the new does battle against the old. In heaven that battle will end with the permanent death and defeat of the old and the gift of eternal victory from Christ for the new.

Outwardly then, with the continued hearing of the Word, the Christian cooperates with God; inwardly God does all the work of preserving with His Word and Sacraments what He created in the first place with that same Word. So the Christian delights in this, that he can eat and drink the goodness and grace of God; however, all glory he gives to God for what God continuously and miraculously accomplishes through such eating and drinking, namely, the preservation of his faith.

Renovation work is soon to commence on the church hall in Toowoomba. Once work is completed (which should be in a couple months, depending on weather etc), Bethlehem Toowoomba would like to hold a concert later in the year, in thanks to all who have supported the project. The concert will be held on a Sunday afternoon, with a date yet to be finalised. Therefore, they are looking for items. If you as an individual, or even as a group, would like to perform (skits, jokes, musical items, singing, anything!!), please contact Barry Zischke on 0427 600073, or [bjzisc@gmail.com](mailto:bjzisc@gmail.com).

**COMING SERVICES**

**PLEASE ALWAYS CHECK YOUR BULLETINS FOR ANY LATE CHANGES –  
THEY CAN HAPPEN!!!**

<b>14 August 10 Pentecost</b>	<b>21 August 11 Pentecost</b>	<b>28 August 12 Pentecost</b>
9.00am TMBA LR 9.30am O/A/G HC combined at Greenwood followed by Bible Study 9.00am LOWOOD LR	8.30am OAK LR 9.00am TMBA HC & Bible Study 9.30am GRN LR 9.30am AUB LR 9.00am MARBURG LR	8.30am OAK LR 9.00am TMBA LR 9.30am GRN LR 9.30am AUB LR 9.00am LOWOOD HC
<b>Sunday, 14 August</b>		
READINGS: Jeremiah 23:16-29; Hebrews 11:17-40; 12:1-3;		Luke 12:49-56
HYMNS: 502 197 376 (840 291) 177		
<b>Sunday, 21 August</b>		
READINGS: Isaiah 66:18-23; Hebrews 12:4-29;		Luke 13:22-30
HYMNS: 26 187 410 (333 292) 178		

**ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Tuesday, 9 August, 7.30pm. Men's Fellowship at Oakey. Opening devotion: John.

Pastor would like for readers in our bookclub, who are able, to begin meeting. For those reading, can you please see me with suitable days and times that would suit, so we can set a time and place?

**BIBLE STUDIES for AUGUST:**

Marburg/Lowood. Sunday the 7<sup>th</sup> at Marburg; Thursday the 25<sup>th</sup> at Lowood.

Aub/Oak/ Grn. Sunday the 14<sup>th</sup>.

Toowoomba. Sunday the 21<sup>st</sup>.

**FUTURE AELC SERVICE DATES:**

September 4 at Greenwood.

October 30 at Toowoomba.

*Welcome to all worshipping with us today!*

Pastor Peter Ziebell, Phone 0407583922.

Email him at [paziebell@gmail.com](mailto:paziebell@gmail.com) or to the church office at [ddaalc@gmail.com](mailto:ddaalc@gmail.com).

***Please notify pastor of anyone who is unwell or in need of a visit.***