SERMON · MT. CALVARY LUTHERAN CHURCH, SANTA CRUZ AREA

Faith You Can Hold

Second Sunday in Lent · March 1, 2026
Readings: Genesis 12:1–4a · Psalm 121 · Romans 4:1–5, 13–17 · John 3:1–17

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Grace and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Today we are told to believe.

Abram believes a promise he cannot see.
Abraham believes and it is reckoned to him as righteousness.
Nicodemus is told he must be born from above.

And in Gospel of John we hear:

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but have eternal life.”

But let’s say it plainly.

When you are sick, belief can feel abstract.
When you are broke, belief can feel thin.
When depression presses on your chest at 3 a.m., belief can feel fragile.

Does faith really matter then?

Yes.

Because faith is not theory.

It is lifeline.

Abram: Trust Without a Map

In Genesis 12, God tells Abram to leave everything familiar.

No details.
No guarantees of comfort.
Just a promise.

And Abram goes.

Faith does not eliminate uncertainty.
It gives you Someone to trust inside it.

For those navigating chemo treatments.
For those waiting on disability approval.
For those calculating rent against groceries.
For those fighting unseen battles in the mind.

Faith does not clear the fog.

It gives you a hand to hold in it.

Paul: When You Have Nothing Left to Prove

In Romans 4, Paul says Abraham was justified by faith, not works.

That matters most when suffering has taken your works away.

When you cannot produce.
When you cannot fix.
When you cannot impress God or anyone else.

If righteousness were wages, the suffering would be bankrupt.

But it is gift.

Faith is simply the empty hand that receives.

And here is the mercy: empty hands are exactly what suffering gives you.

Nicodemus: Born From Above

Nicodemus comes at night.

Jesus tells him he must be born from above.

Birth is not self-improvement.
It is something that happens to you.

And then comes the promise:

“God so loved the world…”

Not the strong world.
Not the stable world.
The anxious world.
The grieving world.
The addicted world.
The cancer-ward world.

Faith is not pretending everything is fine.

Faith is clinging to the love of God when it is not.

But What Does Faith Hold Onto?

Here is where John’s Gospel becomes concrete.

John uses the word “believe” almost a hundred times. But John does not leave belief floating in the air.

Later in this same Gospel, Jesus says:

“My flesh is true food and my blood is true drink.”

In John, believing is not vague spirituality.

Believing attaches you to a crucified and risen body.

And today — at this altar — that body is given to you.

The Eucharist: Faith Made Tangible

When you come forward:

You are not bringing your strength.

You are bringing your hunger.

You are not presenting your résumé.

You are holding out empty hands.

And Christ does not say, “Prove your faith.”

He says, “Take and eat.”

For the one battling illness: this is communion with the Lord who has passed through death.
For the one in poverty: this is the feast of the kingdom where you are heir.
For the one fighting depression: this is light placed directly into your darkness.
For the anxious: this is the steady heartbeat of Christ placed into your fragile body.

Faith is not climbing up to God.

Faith is opening your mouth to receive him.

Lifeline You Can Touch

Imagine someone drowning.

A lifeline must be more than an idea.
It must reach you.

In Word, Christ speaks.
In Baptism, Christ washes.
In the Supper, Christ feeds.

The promise of Gospel of John 3:16 is not sentimental poetry.

It becomes edible.

“God so loved the world…”

So loved the world that he gives himself into your hands.

When Your Faith Is Weak

Some of you feel your faith barely flickering.

Here is the good news:

The power of faith is not in its intensity.

The power of faith is in its object.

A trembling hand that receives the body of Christ still receives Christ.

And he is strong enough for both of you.

Why Belief Matters

Belief matters because it connects you to life that cannot be taken away.

Health can fail.
Money can evaporate.
Moods can collapse.
Bodies can weaken.

But the crucified and risen Christ gives himself to you.

Not as concept.

As communion.

Faith is lifeline because it binds you to the One who has already gone through suffering, death, and grave — and come out the other side.

And here, at this table, he says:

You are not alone.
You are not forgotten.
You are not abandoned.

You are fed.

And that is why belief matters.

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