

FIRST LESSON: Acts 9:36-43
SECOND LESSON: Revelation 7:9-17
THE GOSPEL:

The Fourth Sunday of Easter
May 12, 2019

“Resurrection Confidence”
Sermon Preached by Pastor Lowell Nelson
American Lutheran Church of Sun City

Grace and peace through our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, be in your life now and forever. Amen.

Confidence is another word for trust, and that you can trust God is one of my major message points because it is the major message point of the scriptures. We can trust God. This trust is not just a concept, it is a trust in a living God, Jesus Christ resurrected, alive, the power of the Holy Spirit as enter Pentecost season in June, that joy of understanding the strength of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, all alive, not just a concept but the living God. That is resurrection confidence.

Having trust in another is a beautiful way to live life. It is the ideal of marriage. It is the ideal of working together. It is the ideal of this church. It is the ideal and often we fall short of this ideal. I’m going to use another golf analogy. Just let me see the congregation again. How many of you are golfers? (hands raise). Okay, this is a little better. On Saturday, hardly anybody was a golfer. So for you who are not, let me just say this to you again: It is very hard to swing the club and hit the little white ball. If you don’t have that as a concept, you’re are not going to get it. At least for me it is hard. So this has to do with trust. Back in the Midwest, I was trying to improve my game some years ago. I went to a local pro who actually has some players he works with during the Master’s. He is a really good pro; I’m a really bad player. The recipe is, well, he tried; I’ll say that. So, as we were working together, he could tell that it was going to take a lot. I’m kind of cheap, and I did not want to invest lots and lots of money into the whole thing. So we just worked on the setup which is: I would get my grip on the selected club and the ball would be down there on the tee, just to make sure I was focused on the shot, and that is not as easy as it sounds because for me I would remember the last bad shot or hope for the next good one. He said, “This is what I want you to do. I want you to use a key word that is going to get you focused, and we’re going to use the word ‘trust.’” So, I got up there and I thought “trust,” swing; duffed it. He told me to try again. “Trust,” sliced it. “Trust,” hooked it. One more time, mediocre. He said, “It would help if you had a swing you could trust.” And that was pretty much the end of our relationship.

I thought that was a little bit similar to faith life, which is, to be honest, I did not really trust him as my coach and I did not trust myself. I was just using the word. This is my encouragement to you: The trust that we have focused in the living God, Jesus Christ, is a relational word. It is not a concept word, it's a relational word.

This relationship during this Easter season has come in different ways. Pastor Chuck, when he preached his last sermon, which was perfect for Pastor Chuck, was on doubting Thomas. Doubts that we have as people of faith. The doubts we have are the shadow that is caused by faith. You have no doubts if you did not have some element of faith, so don't be concerned about your doubts. As you question, invest in life, pray for the Spirit to open up and pray for us as a church to be helpful to you. When Thomas got his answers to the living Christ, he changed from Thomas the Doubter to Thomas the Builder. Incredible, productive ministry all the way into Asia and to India.

Then last week, speaking of the reclaiming of Peter, I have this little saying, it's a powerful saying not because I made it but because it is the truth, which is: Do not let your past determine your future. God's future for you determines all that is important. Consider Peter, who had so horrifically stumbled through his testimony phase when he denied Christ three times. Then we saw the symmetry last week where Jesus brought him into a living relationship again to reclaim this beautiful future for him. We see it in the first lesson today from Acts where Peter is an agent of healing for Dorcas, which is a word that means gazelle, a beautiful feminine word. Peter was reclaimed. So, yes, the mistakes he had made were offset by this living relationship. Not just a word like he can trust, but a living relationship with Jesus Christ and that beauty of intimacy.

Then this week, faith and trust in God's promises. It is funny, for me, I like to argue sometimes. I like to have debates. Often church language can get into structural differences. I won't go into great detail about that, but we as people of faith are much more interested in relational concepts, the promises and this word, "patience." The Gospel text says it this way, that there were people asking Jesus (in this beautiful structure, the porticos of Solomon on the east side of the temple) and saying it in this way, "tell us plainly, don't keep us in suspense, who are you? Are you the messiah?" I thought that for our trust, there is an element of risk, that we need to be patient.

I'm always struck by the way that word works. In the hospital, we're called a patient, right? And it is also descriptive because you will learn to be patient when you are in a hospital. There are such intricacies of procedures that most of us do not understand, and from what I can tell, having worked with doctors and nurses who are sometimes hospitalized, it does not help them to understand the process either because it is just as aggravating to them when they are on the receiving end. To be patient for healing, to be patient for the team to work together, this patience is not just a pixie dust God give me

patience, but it is during these circumstances to have a deepened relationship with Christ. I pray that for all of us, to have a deepened relationship with Christ. These people yielded their patience and wanted an answer right away, yet did not yet hear.

This resurrection confidence is, again, not just a word like me trying to say “trust” and swing, it is relationship in and with Jesus Christ. Luther had beautiful things to say about this. He called this type of confidence a living, bold trust in God’s grace through Jesus Christ. It is found in Jesus Christ, living and bold. In fact, he got into big trouble and I used it when I was a teenager trying to debate with my father. There is a quote that goes like this, “Sin boldly.” That is where I stopped it, this quote from Martin Luther. But it actually goes, “Sin boldly, but believe or trust even more boldly.” I like that now as I’m older, which is, it is a little less about trying to not make mistakes, it’s about trusting more in God’s love for you and for this world.

Debbie and I sometimes get nervous about the future. We do not even have grandkids and we’re nervous about the future. There is enough news that gets us dismayed. We went shopping for a table, and I do not really like shopping, but I was especially nice this day so I went with her, oh lucky woman that she is (laughter). We went to two different stores. We were at one store and I started a conversation with a young woman. In our conversation in the first couple of minutes, she just said that had recently been baptized. Well, that gave me an opening. I don’t think her sales manager was too happy, but we talked about that. Debbie asked what we were doing and I told her we were talking about her baptism. She was a dear young person. She has a boyfriend she can trust and were praying for their marriage. This was in a nice little store. Debbie and I went to another store even though there was a perfectly good table at that little store. I guess there is fun in the hunt or something like that. The next place we went, there was a young man. I found out that he was a senior in high school. He shared a bit of scripture. I think he had asked how we had come down here, because I’d shared that our table had been damaged during our move. I told him I was a pastor, serving at American Lutheran Church. He quoted just a little bit of scripture to me, which was really stunning, and we followed up on that. He talked of his interest in the love for the Lord. You might call it avoidance that I do not like shopping. I’ll just call it that I need to be patient for the Lord’s promises. He is raising fine young people. Maybe it is different from when we grew up, but these two people gave me some hope that God’s work is not done. God’s work and our hands celebrating this.

I want to conclude with this idea to be patient is to be able to trust God, to be able to trust God is confidence in Jesus Christ. It’s not just a word, not just a feeling, but trust in the actual living God. There is encouragement for us through Luther. He was always concerned that faith showed itself as works and that if we worked hard enough, we would think we had enough faith. He says it is not what you think. You hear the people

need to be more pious to be saved. They think that when you hear the Gospel, you start working and then create by your own strength a thankful heart which says I believe. They think that is what it is, but this is not true faith. Instead, faith is God's work in us that changes us and gives us a new birth from God. It kills the old Adam and makes us completely different people. It changes our hearts, our spirits, our thoughts, our powers. It brings the Holy Spirit with it. Then this line that I just love, it is a living, creative, active and powerful thing, this faith. Faith is a living, bold trust in God's grace so certain of God's favor that it would risk death a thousand trusting in it. So ask God to work faith in you. Amen.

So for this Easter season, I ask for you and I to be patient for what God is doing, to trust that God is bringing forward a new generation of those who believe and our opportunities to share this goodness with them. It is also an encouragement to reclaim your personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Sometimes that was used in the past to make it kind of a differentiation, do you have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, and there was a certain response you needed to give. I just say it the other way: This is the Christ who died for us, that is so deeply personal. Luther said it this way: We are saved by faith alone, but the faith that saves is never alone. That means that Christ is with and for us. That means we have this opportunity patiently to share it with others and to swing away, to swing through the gift of prayer and the gift of worship, the gift of encouraging others, to study the scriptures and to serve all in need. Maybe our swings are a little bit off, maybe we're going to hook a few or slice a few, but we have this opportunity that with the living God, we are not just saying the word trust, we have the One in which we can trust. To gather with God's people such as this morning in united adoration of the Father, it is as necessary to the Christian life as prayer. So, I give thanks that we can trust. This is the God who loves us. As Jesus says it, this is the trust that can never be denied. My sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow me. I will give them eternal life and they will never perish and no one will snatch them out of my hand. That is the confidence in which you and I can live. Thanks be to God! Amen.