

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church
Quincy, IL
Rev. Martin Eden

Easter 5
Saturday, May 6, 2023, at 5:00 p.m.
Sunday, May 7, 2023, at 9:00 a.m.

“If You Have Your Faith, You Have Everything”

John 14:1-14

Christ is risen!! He is risen indeed!! Alleluia!!

When I hear Jesus saying that “anyone who believes in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these”: whenever I hear that, my skeptical nature says “Wait a minute, Jesus. You said the same thing after You healed the man who had been crippled for 38 years. You said to him, ‘Take up your mat and walk.’ And then You told the disciples that anyone who has faith in You will do even greater things than these.”

And my skeptical nature hears Jesus say that if I have faith the size of a mustard seed that I can tell a mountain to throw itself into the sea and it will do it. I suppose I could give it a shot this evening/morning, but then Quincy is rather lacking in both mountains and seas. I could try and throw a bluff into the river, but I don’t think the people in West Quincy would appreciate that if I were successful.

This is one of those many instances when it pays to be Lutheran. We ask the question, “What does this mean?”

Jesus performed many miracles of help and healing which are not duplicated by any person today. If modern-day “faith healers” could actually bring healing, they should spend all day every day at children’s hospitals rather than performing for money. We can’t do healing miracles like Jesus did. This being true, what does Jesus mean that if we have faith, we will do even greater things than he did here on earth?

We need to step out of the realm of material and physical blessings. There is an old saying, “If you have your health, you have everything.” That’s wrong. If you have your faith in the Living God you have everything. Without faith, you have nothing – even if you were to gain the whole world. As Jesus says, “What does it profit a man to gain the whole world, yet lose his soul?”

We need to develop an understanding, as Christ did, of what is truly important. What exactly did Jesus accomplish during His ministry on earth? There were lame who walked; blind who received sight; deaf who were able to hear; even a few dead people were raised. But how well was the good news received by the people? How firmly was the church established? Where were the throngs of faithful as Christ was led to Mt. Calvary?

Jesus preached for three years. At the end of His ministry, what did the Church look like? There was what? – 120 people counted as disciples. That’s what it says in the book of Acts.

On the day of Pentecost, 10 days after Jesus left them and ascended into heaven, when Peter was guided by the Holy Spirit and preached his mighty sermon, 3000 came to faith and were baptized that day. Since then, several billion have heard and received the Gospel. According to Wikipedia (so you know it’s true), there are about 73 million Lutherans in the world. We have 1.8 million in the Missouri Synod.

If you want to hear about the greater miracle, the church in Africa is booming. As of 2008, there were 14 million Lutherans in Africa. The latest data shows there are now over 24 million Lutherans in Africa. But I would guess that is a low number because there are currently over 14 million Lutherans in Kenya and Tanzania alone, and Namibia is now over 50% Lutheran. 70 years ago, there were only a handful. You could count them on your fingers and toes. The Gospel in Africa in our lifetime has been a mountain-moving miracle. And

Uganda is just getting started.

Now if I were able to heal the sick, walk on water, or feed you 5000 at a time with a few loaves and fish, you would probably be dazzled and amazed. That is something about which I am sure you would tell your friends and neighbors.

But Jesus says, “That’s nothing. Whoever believes in Me . . . greater works than these will he do.” Jesus is saying this to His disciples as they are gathered in the Upper Room. Jesus is hours away from going to the cross. Whoever believes has the power to do even greater miracles than all the physical healing and authority over creation He has shown up to this point.

Whoever believes can proclaim the truth about Christ and His victory over sin and death. The greater miracle is when the light of faith shines forth into a once dark and empty heart. Those who were born spiritually blind, dead, enemies of God are forgiven their sin and are given new life and a home in the family of God. That is the greater miracle.

To perform miracles that dazzle and amaze is one thing. The evidence of Jesus’ miracles clearly demonstrate God’s power over all creation. They were great. However, it is in the message of the Gospel, in the mercy of God and forgiveness won by Christ, that God and His power are truly revealed.

As Luke tells us in Acts, after the resurrection, it is clear that the disciples had come to understand that the Word of God was primary. This is not to say that providing the widows with food is unimportant. I would certainly never say that. It’s just that the Word of God is even more important. As I said before, “If you have your faith, you have everything.” This supersedes even your health – even food.

Whatever is your highest priority, that is your God. Reading the Book of Acts offers an amazing picture of what life was like for those early Christians.

Their daily devotion, daily gathering to hear the Word, coming together each evening to share the Sacrament along with the evening meal. Sharing their material goods so that they make sure that the widows don't go hungry.

And boldly proclaiming the Word of God, even when you know it will be unpopular. And in the stoning of Stephen, we see a microcosm of how Christ's Church is supposed to be. We will be persecuted. The church has always been persecuted. Jesus told us to expect to be persecuted. Yet, we are to continue to boldly proclaim the message of salvation in Christ crucified and risen from the dead. We proclaim it even if those around us refuse to listen. We pray the Gospel is heard and we pray for God's mercy even on our enemies and those who seek to do us harm.

Stephen cried out, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." And thankfully for the sake of Saul of Tarsus, the Lord did not hold this sin against him. But rather, on the road to Damascus, God called Saul out of the deadness of his sin and sent him as the apostle Paul to preach His Word and through him great and mighty works were done, Christ's victory over sin and death was proclaimed throughout the Roman world, and thousands upon thousands of God's children were brought out of darkness into light, out of death into life. That is the greater miracle.

Your faith is a miracle. You being born again through water and the Word is a greater miracle than even the life and birth which brought you into this world. "If you have your faith, you have everything." Amen.

Christ is risen!! He is risen indeed!! Alleluia!!

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