

Grace to Help Us In Our Time of Need

Hebrews 4:12-16

Once upon a time a good-natured farmer lived in Russia. He got up early in the morning to till the land, bringing a piece of bread for breakfast. The farmer put the piece of bread he brought from home under a tree and then started to till the land. When he felt hungry, he stopped the tilling and tried to find the piece of bread under the tree. Strangely, the bread had disappeared. The good-natured farmer drank water instead of bread to fill his empty stomach without complaining, and he murmured, "There's no way to find it! I'll not be starved to death for skipping a meal. The one who took my bread may be more in need of it than I am. I wish him well."

The stealer of the farmer's bread was the devil. The devil tried to tempt the farmer to commit sin by stealing bread. But, the farmer didn't commit sin. The good-natured farmer even didn't scold the thief, but rather blessed him. Perplexed, the devil was rebuked by the Great Devil because of the incident. "You are not smart enough to be a devil. You are supposed to use smarter tricks!" Later, the devil attempted a new trick to tempt the farmer to sin.

The devil returned to the farmer, bringing bread instead of stealing it. The devil was disguised as a diligent servant to the farmer who helped the farmer. The disguised servant advised the farmer to spread seeds on the high lands during the flood season and to spread seeds on the swamp land during the drought season.

Thus, the farmer got more and more crops every year. When the surplus crops piled up in the farmer's barn, the devil taught him how to make wine with the harvest. The farmer was delighted to invite friends to eat, drink and to entertain them. When they drank the wine for the first time, they became sly like foxes, making fun and flattering one another. Upon the second drink, they became like wolves, snarling and quarreling with one another. And, then when they drank a third time, they became like pigs, spilling and yelling, and became smutty.

When the Great Devil saw the people who were drunk, and had become like pigs, the he was delighted and said that the trick was successful. The chief of the devils call the devil servant and asked him what the trick was and how he did it. The devil said, "What I did was only make them have more crops than they needed!" This is a story called "The Devil and a Piece of Bread," written by Leo Tolstoy.

Sometimes, plenty makes life worse than the times of need. We have a tendency toward comparing ourselves with others who have more than we have, and feel unfortunate, relatively. But, Leo Tolstoy sees life differently—that wealth or

surplus crops are not a barometer of happiness. Rather, they could bring temptation on humans for corruption or to fall into misery.

Today's scripture reading, Hebrews 4:12-16, teaches us from where the grace of the Lord comes and how faith is experienced in life. We, as the people of God, very seldom fall into despair and frustration that we are nothing, compared with others. I found three elements of faith which gives us such strength in today's scripture reading.

My wife, Sun, tells me that I so often preach in examples of three, she commented, "Why not sometimes two or four?" Three is a perfect number. When you want to set a pole on the ground, you need at least three supports. Otherwise, you cannot set a pole. To have a more firm family, it is better to have three than two. A couple who has a child is harder to separate than the one who does not. God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are three persons in One God. Humanity consists of three elements; body, mind and soul. Likewise, three elements are perfect to hold our faith firmly. So, again, I would like use 3 C's in explaining three elements of faith.

First of all, confession is the foundation of the faith. The Apostle Paul urged us to confess Jesus as our Lord. "If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved." (Romans 10:9-10)

Have you heard the name, "Bill Bright?" He is the founder of Campus Crusade for Christ. He has led more than three million young people to Christ through Campus Crusade for Christ. Someone asked him how he could do that. He said, "When I was a young man, I made a contract with God. I literally wrote it out and signed my name at the bottom. It said, "From this day forward, I am a slave of Jesus Christ." He not only professes that Jesus Christ as his Lord with his lips, but he also wrote that he is the slave of Jesus Christ on paper by his own hand. This makes him different than he was.

The Scripture says, "Therefore, let us hold fast our profession." (verse 14) Let us cling to our personal faith in and our public confession of Jesus as our Savior. This profession includes our belief that we need a high priest. We cannot approach the throne of the Lord without the Lord who is our high priest to ask for the mercy and grace of God.

Secondly, having confidence in what we believe in our mind is also important. Doubt is the opposite of faith. Our confidence of faith includes Jesus our Lord, who was crucified, and resurrected, as well as the Word of the Lord, the promise of the Lord, and the Word of God in the Bible.

When Jesus visited his disciples after his resurrection, the disciples were terrified. Jesus asked them, "Why do you doubt me?" And, he added, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!" Jesus also said to them, "Why are you troubled and why do doubts rise in your minds? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I, myself! Touch me and see—a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have."

The confidence that the Lord will be with us, and lead us into His way is the unshaken foundation of our faith today.

Lastly, courage and boldness lies in our power of faith. Courage is the spirit of faith to overcome whatever circumstances we face. Even if we have faith in the first and second stages, if we do not have the courage of faith, the third stage, we will lose the power of faith. Fear is the opposite of faith.

When Jesus was walking on water, his disciples on the boat saw him, and they cried out because they thought he was a ghost. They were terrified. Immediately, he spoke to them and said, "Take courage! It is I." "Don't be afraid!" "Don't be afraid!" is the word of God to the people of God in the Bible.

Sometimes we are discouraged by circumstances that seem to block our paths and keep us from going forward. Because of powerlessness, weakness, or hopelessness, or failures, both physical and spiritual, we become discouraged from pressing ahead. The scripture lesson today encourages us, "Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need."

Have you found any good news from the news paper? What is the good news for today? Where does the good news come from? The good news we have this morning is the promise of the Lord through the scriptures. We can get the good news when the covenants between God and us in Jesus Christ take place.

Jesus says to us, "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you." (John 15:5-7)

The column, "Dear Abby," in the Wyoming Tribune gives us interesting illustrations in common life. Last Thursday's column, titled, "Mom rations the many gifts her young daughters receive," reminds us of the habits of saving the grace of God rather than using and sharing of it.

A story goes like this. An aunt sent a birthday present to her seven-year-old niece. When the aunt didn't get a response from her sister, she called her sister to ask if

it had arrived. Her sister said, "Oh, yeah, we got it. We've been busy and so we didn't open it. We'll get to it someday." The aunt felt terrible, knowing her niece didn't get the gift on her birthday, and didn't know her aunt had remembered her.

The aunt learned since that her niece wasn't given the gifts she sent last Christmas, either, which explains why she didn't receive thank-you notes. The reason was that the niece gets lots of presents, so her mom limits when the girl can have them. She gives them as rewards or saves them for rainy days.

We are fearful when we have nothing to save for rainy days. We cannot give to others and to God because we have no faith for the future. How do we reciprocate God's grace when we cannot give to God?

Use your blessings today for God and be of courage to let yourself be empty. Then, God will fill you needs with fresh blessing. God is grace that gives to us in our time of need.