

**Authentic Faith | Luke 12:49-56; Hebrews 11:29-12:2 | LUMC| 8-14-2022**  
**By Rev Grace Kanake**

Dear Church family and friends: Last week we learned that faith moves mountains. By faith Abraham was able to survive in a foreign land though his faith was severely tested. Abraham survived because he stood on the promises of God and practiced authentic faith in the midst of trials. If he was here today in our culture, relying on our constitution, he would hear people interpreting him as having stood his ground. Because of his authentic faith, God rewarded him with blessings: His offspring multiplied. They formed a prophesied United Kingdom in 1035 to 970 BCE and the modern nation in 1948, and God continues to bless those who bless them.

We learn prayers may be answered after a long wait, or even after one forgets the prayer. And that's even if life takes a downward spiral. God never leaves believers without a witness. While Abraham was one of a kind, we hear in today's readings of others who by faith received blessings, and others who may have died before they experienced the outcome of their faith.

St Paul takes us through the Old Testament describing the outcome of an authentic faith. He reminds us that passing through the Red Sea was by faith, though that miracle was catastrophic to the Egyptians. The collapse of the Jericho wall happened because those who surrounded the city had faith in their God. The Israelites encircling the city knew God would reward their faith and send the Jericho inhabitants to their deaths. In the city,<sup>1</sup> a well-known lady, Rahab, a prostitute, was spared death. She entered the annals of history despite her past life that was abhorred by the people of her city. Rahab was kind and reasonable. She refused to let foreigners entering her city be mistreated and killed by the murderous hardcore people of the city. Rahab knew that the death of innocent people would make the city look bad in the eyes of neighbors and the nation. Rahab's faith in God who preserves life, made her bold even though most women of her time were not. They were traumatized and humiliated by men.

Paul says authentic faith can influence secular leaders to make prudent decisions. They can rule justly and be seen to be practicing their faith in decision-making. David was one of the leaders said to have practiced faith in his leadership. King David, a former shepherd, had great passion for God. We are told that in some cases he failed, like in causing the death of Uriah. David's faith in God was authentic because, as a human with a sinful mind, he revived his faith by repenting whenever his sins were pointed out. David never defended his sins or tried to convince others that he was right when he felt conscientious guilt.

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<sup>1</sup> There are debates if loving God can punish his children by death yet loving. These readings are scaring because we encounter both loving and ruthless God. God appear to favor only those who believe and follow the rules of love. These readings are warning each of us to be accountable of our actions. God is Just and does not sympathize with evil doers. Jesus encourages authentic faith in mist of trails.

Authentic faith gets tested, but what matters is how we respond to our failures. When Daniel was judged guilty and thrown into lion's den, he did not fear for his life, nor did he deny his faith or lie to save face. Daniel stood strong in his faith and the lions became his friends. They played with him a 'game of chess,' tossing him here and there instead of making him their food. That episode put the city in fear. As it turned out, Daniel's accusers became the lions' food. This is to me what authentic faith is in midst of temptations.

Finally, St Paul turns to explain persecutions the early Christians of authentic faith went through. Some liberal theologians argue that the Old Testament is oral history of the Jewish people and cannot be fully relied upon. I do not buy that view because the God of then is the God of now, and those who believe in God receive miracles even today. The persecutions Authentic Christians went through is recorded in history books, and archeological discoveries continue to confirm most events that took place.

During trying times most Christians lose their faith either because of fear or just inability to stand their ground. Unfortunately, some do not stand to be counted. During those early persecutions some Christians ran away, and others simply denied their faith to survive. When peace prevailed in the third century, those who escaped during persecution wanted to come back to church by making themselves innocent or playing victims. The church refused to accept them back until after five years of reflection and repentance.

History informs us that authentic faith was kept by some western Christians during the first and second world wars. One of these Authentic Christians was Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German pastor and theologian. He was strongly urged by several politicians and Christian organizations to leave Germany before his death. He refused to leave his people saying, "When Christ Calls a Man [or woman], He Bids Him [or her] Come and Die". Dietrich Bonhoeffer was killed by the Nazis because he openly opposed the killing of the Jews.<sup>2</sup> St Paul says some faithful Christians like Dietrich can stand their faith and die before their freedom is achieved. Authentic Christians face a different kind of persecution today and we must carry on our faith's torch.

It is important to note that the reason the church designed the narthex was to keep those people who ran away from contaminating Authentic Christians who stood their faith through the persecution. The lapsed persons who returned to their churches would listen to the service in the narthex and then leave before Authentic Christians went out of the church. (Sounds judgmental?).

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<sup>2</sup> "The cross is laid on every Christian. The first Christ-suffering which every man must experience is the call to abandon the attachments of this world. It is that dying of the old man which is the result of his encounter with Christ. As we embark upon discipleship, we surrender ourselves to Christ in union with his death—we give over our lives to death. Thus it begins; the cross is not the terrible end to an otherwise god-fearing and happy life, but it meets us at the beginning of our communion with Christ. When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die. It may be a death like that of the first disciples who had to leave home and work to follow him, or it may be a death like Luther's, who had to leave the monastery and go out into the world. But it is the same death every time—death in Jesus Christ, the death of the old man at his call."

--from The Cost of Discipleship, by Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Jesus reminds us that authentic faith can divide business partners, friends, and members of the same household. I believe Jesus is saying that those who follow him genuinely will not allow themselves to live a double life. They will not be “church Christians” only but also in their homes, at their places of work and in their communities. They will practice their faith despite their surroundings. They will say, “My faith does not allow me to lie or join in injustice even if it is my spouse, parent, sibling or friend asking me to do so.” We know of those who have not let their faith to be swayed toward wrong decisions.

One of the authentic faithful Christians I know is a retired judge. A very influential and powerful person had case in which he wanted to bribe the judge to favor him. He took a big fat envelope to the judge’s wife through a friend of a friend. The wife delivered the envelope and asked her husband to consider helping the guy. He did not accept the envelope but asked her to keep it. After a time, he decided his wife must be arrested for taking a bribe.

One morning he called and asked her to bring the envelope to him at court. She took the envelope. The judge had instructed the prosecutor to make sure she had the money and to arrest her and bring her in. When she was handcuffed and brought into court, the judge asked her to produce the envelope, which she did. She was then asked to explain what it was for and how she got it. She would not divulge this, so the judge found her guilty of bribery and sentenced her to two years of home detention. Her credentials were taken away like any other criminal. She served her probationary period because of her first crime—corruption by bribing a judge to thwart justice. The judge instructed that the money be donated to a homeless project because the briber’s effort had made many residents homeless. This true story is an indication of authentic faith.

My husband also tells of a story from one of his family members who told him, “I am the devil now. I am going to tempt you until you fail your faith.” He says the temptation went on for a month; it was severe, but he never gave up and finally the person said: “I have failed. I give up now”. I am not sure how much your faith has been tested and withstood the test at the family or friendship level.

Friends, our faith—our ticket to eternity—must stand the test of our time if our goal is to dine and sing with angels and live an unending life of joy. I hope today’s scripture readings help you to reflect on your faith, and encourage you to continue to live according to God’s teachings. I pray you and I shall continue our Authentic Christian journey of faith. St Paul ends the reading by saying, “We are surrounded by a crowd of witnesses and should avoid sinning, but run with perseverance the race of faith set before us.” We must continue “looking into Jesus, the perfecter of our faith”. Jesus endured every temptation, shame and humiliation, and finally went to the cross for our sake. Remember: he is also our judge. I pray we do not think our own wisdom and knowledge are our means for eternity, for only faith is. Amen.