

Proper 22/20th Sunday after Pentecost (Series C)

“I Know My Faith Is Founded” (*Lutheran Service Book* #587)

After Jesus says some words about stumbling and sinning and the need to forgive someone who sins and is repentant – all recorded at the beginning of Luke 17, his followers say “Increase our faith!” (Luke 17:5).

The exclamation point is right there in the NRSV, so these words are a command, or an urgent plea. The disciples say them in response to the words about stumbling and sinning, apparently understanding that they are not strong enough to resist opportunities to stumble or temptations to sin.

Erdmann Neumeister, the late 17th and early 18th century poet, puts all that in the person of Satan at the beginning of stanza two of his chorale, “I Know My Faith Is Founded.” But before we get there, we must linger a bit with the words of stanza one. Here the singer makes a bold statement of faith, sounding like Peter in some of his rash moments recounted in the Gospels. “I know . . . unmoved I stand . . . my faith shall rest secure.” These are bold words that we sing.

Then stanza two begins, and things shift quickly.

Increase my faith, dear Savior,
for Satan seeks by night and day
to rob me of this treasure
and take my hope of bliss away.

Neumeister puts into Satan, who Luther named “the ancient foe,” all the things that trouble our faith. With all that we encounter, whether it’s the temptation to trust in our own reason and strength, or the evil we see and hear in our world, we know we must echo the Lukan disciples and cry “increase my faith!” This week, in the news, we saw and heard about stabbings at a mall in Minnesota with nine people injured, and about bombs in New Jersey and New York injuring 29, and about a cease fire unravelling in Syria. We continue to struggle with shootings of people of African descent by police officers. We suspect our faith is insufficient; how do we know if we have enough?

Jesus in Luke 17 and Neumeister in this chorale answer like this: it’s not the amount of faith that you have that is at question. Rather, it’s in what do you place your faith? Or better, in whom do you place your faith?

Thankfully, Neumeister gives a solid answer. Our Christian faith is founded on Jesus Christ, and the Word (promises) of God. It does not matter whether we feel that Jesus is close to us, or think our faith is strong. Quite the opposite: our faith does not depend on us at all! I am weak, but God is strong. My faith may slip away, but God’s Word abides forever. This world may crumble, but God has adopted me in Baptism, and will not let me fall.

So, in Neumeister’s text in stanza three, we turn in prayer to our Lord Jesus Christ.

In faith, Lord, let me serve you;
though persecution, grief, and pain
should seek to overwhelm me,
let me a steadfast trust retain;

and then at my departure
Lord, take me home to you,
your riches to inherit
as all you said holds true,
in life and death, Lord, keep me
until your heav'n I gain,
where I by your great mercy
the end of faith attain.



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I know my faith is founded
on Jesus Christ, my God and Lord;
and this my faith confessing,
unmoved I stand on his sure Word.
Our reason cannot fathom
the truth of God profound;
who trusts in human wisdom
relies on shifting ground.
God's Word is all-sufficient,
it makes divinely sure;
and trusting in its wisdom,
my faith shall rest secure.

Increase my faith, dear Savior,
for Satan seeks by night and day
to rob me of this treasure
and take my hope of bliss away.
But, Lord, with you beside me,
I shall be undismayed;
and led by your good Spirit,
I shall be unafraid.

Abide with me, O Savior,
a firmer faith bestow;
then I shall bid defiance
to ev'ry evil foe.

In faith, Lord, let me serve you;
though persecution, grief, and pain
should seek to overwhelm me,
let me a steadfast trust retain;
and then at my departure
Lord, take me home to you,
your riches to inherit
as all you said holds true,
In life and death, Lord, keep me
until your heav'n I gain,
where I by your great mercy
the end of faith attain.

Text: Erdmann Neumeister, 1671-1756; tr. *The Lutheran Hymnal*, 1941, alt.
Tune: NUN LOB, MEIN SEEL. *Concentus novi*, Augsburg, 1540

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[This devotion was written for the website of the Center for Church Music. It may be downloaded and duplicated for local use.]