**Worship Service October 29, 2023**

**Good morning, everyone! It is good to be in the house of the Lord with you all this morning!**

**Announcements:** Just a reminder that daylight saving time ends on Nov, 5th. We are now starting to collect items to fill shoe boxes! The RUMC Preschool is selling gift cards, if you purchase a gift card through them you get the full face value of the gift cards and the company you purchase a gift card for donates to the preschool.

**2:11 North: “Happy Day”**

**Lighting of the Christ Candle:** Let’s be in an attitude of prayer, as we light our Christ candle.“Light of Christ, shine on our path. Chase away all darkness. Illuminate our pathways. And lead us to the heart of God.” Amen.

**2:11 North: “My Jesus”**

**Children’s Chat: What is Faith? Trusting God’s Promises:** Hello! I want to start with a little guessing game…what do you think I have inside this bag?? Well, what if I told you that this bag had a cookie inside? Would you believe me? How could you know for sure? Well, I guess I could prove it to you. Why don’t I take it out of the bag?

Okay, here it is! You can see it…looks like a cookie, right? You could touch it if you wanted to, and see that it feels like a cookie. You could smell it. You can even take a bite and taste that it is definitely a cookie! But what if I didn’t take it out of the bag? You would have to trust me, and believe that it was a cookie even if you couldn’t see it. You’d have to have faith that I was saying the truth. Do you know what faith means?

The Bible talks about faith, and says some great things about people who demonstrated faith. The Bible says that faith is being confident and assured of things we hope for, but cannot see. Having faith means that we believe even if we cannot be physically a hundred percent sure. Can we see God? Not necessarily…we see evidence of what He has done and continues to do. But we cannot always see His face or touch him with our hands.

Faith means we still know He is there and that He does wonderful things for us. But do you know the truly wonderful thing? We don’t have to do anything special to have faith. It does not depend on us or any sort of actions we might do. Faith is not about us; it’s about God. It is about what He has already done and what He promises to do. You see, trust has to do with what we are believing. To trust someone, it helps to know they are worthy of trust. If you know me well, and you know I tell the truth, you might not have much difficulty believing there was a cookie in the bag. But if you had just met me, it might be harder to trust me.

We know that God is worthy of our trust. He has already proven it, because every promise of the Bible came true! Because of Jesus, we have all we need and our lives are covered in God’s grace. That’s a pretty amazing thing to put our faith in.

It’s also important to know that faith gives us hope. Sometimes our lives as Christians are not easy. Some of the people in the Bible who demonstrated faith had extreme challenges. Some of them, like Stephen who we talked about last week, even died! Trusting God does not mean our lives on earth will always go smoothly. But it does mean that we have a future hope for something greater.

We know that there’s a Heavenly home awaiting us, and that God has promised us something much better than a cookie. We trust in Him and put our hope in what He has already done for us. Our Heavenly treasure awaits us one day, and in that we can place our faith!

Let’s say an echo prayer:

Dear God, Thank You for being worthy of our trust. Thank You for all You have done and for all You promise to do. Help us to have faith and to believe in Your Word. Thank You for Your love and for sending Jesus. In His name, Amen!

**Offering** Before we collect our offering, just a word on how it will be distributed. Offerings that identify a specific church, either by the name written on a check, or a cash offering with the church name written on the envelope, will go to the church as requested. The amount of any gifts collected that are not specifically identified will be equally divided and given to each church to put toward their mission and outreach projects.

May we give out of the love that we have for Jesus Christ, so that others may share in our imperishable and unfading inheritance of hope and life. Let us worship God now with our gifts, tithes and offerings.

**Let’s sing the Doxology as we praise the Lord for our many blessings;** “Praise God from whom all blessings flow. Praise Him all creatures here below. Praise Him above ye heav'nly host. Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost! Amen” **Let’s pray as we dedicate our giving to Him…** Lord of all mercy and compassion, bless these gifts lovingly offered, those who have offered them and those who will receive them. Use us and these gifts in ministries of hope and love that reach out and touch not only those in need in our community, but also our nation and the world. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

**Joys & Concerns:** – Pray for Larissa on this new chapter in life. Sherri L just welcomed her first great-grandchild into this world. **Let us turn to the Lord in prayer…** Merciful Lord, our hearts are filled today with pain and concern for the future of our world. Words of anger and acts of hatred surround us — we cannot escape from the threats being thrown about. We wander around in darkness and despair, seeking light and hope. Forgive us when we forget that You are always with us, through times of peace and times of conflict. Heal our souls. Help us to reach out to others with the assurance of Your love and presence.

We like to think that we do everything well. We pat ourselves on the back when we act with love and mercy toward others, complimenting ourselves in self-righteousness. But You know us better. You know our faults and our failings. You know when we falsely proclaim that we are truly living as You would have us live. Teach us again about Your forgiving and healing love. Show us ways of merciful living that we may extend the love and mercy You have given us to others. Forgive us, we pray.

Lord of light, in the midst of darkness and fear, You call us to be a community of peace, love and hope. You remind us of the blessings we have and the opportunities to share those blessings with others. We praise and thank You for all these things and for Your constant presence with us.

Today, as Your church seeking peace and healing, we offer the names of loved ones who are struggling with illness, with loss, with feelings of alienation and fear, seeking Your healing and hope in their lives. As we have lifted up our concerns, we also offer up prayers of love and rejoicing, thanksgiving and joy for all You have done and continue to do for us and those we love.

We ask Your special blessing upon Larissa Richards as she turns the page to begin the next chapter of her life’s journey with You. Keep her safe in her new home and may she feel Your presence and peace with her as she begins serving in her new vocation. We thank you, Lord, for the time we’ve had together and praise You for the light and love she brought to our church, the same light and love she brings to everyone she meets. May she feel the love and prayers that go with her and may she always remember she her church home here with us whenever she returns to Rittman.

We also ask Your special blessing upon Taylor Klingerman, our church’s new administrative assistant. We look forward to serving You and Your people together with her in ministry and may she and her husband Chris find a warm welcome at Rittman. Bless our time with Taylor as You have blessed our time with Larissa.

Lord, we thank You for Your healing mercies and Your sustaining love for us. We are confident in Your abiding presence with us. Help us to be faithful to You in all times and in all places. Give us the grace to accept the forgiveness You have offered to each of us. As You have forgiven us, help us be forgiving to others. Let us bring peace and hope, keeping doors open for healing and redemption. Walk with us, Lord, this day and all our days.

**For it is in Jesus’ name that we offer this prayer, as we pray the prayer He taught us to pray:** “Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy Name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.”

**Hymn of Preparation: “Crown Him with Many Crowns”**

**Scripture**: **1 Pete 1:3-9** “3 May the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ be blessed! On account of his vast mercy, he has given us new birth. You have been born anew into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. 4 You have a pure and enduring inheritance that cannot perish—an inheritance that is presently kept safe in heaven for you. 5 Through his faithfulness, you are guarded by God’s power so that you can receive the salvation he is ready to reveal in the last time.

6 You now rejoice in this hope, even if it’s necessary for you to be distressed for a short time by various trials. 7 This is necessary so that your faith may be found genuine. (Your faith is more valuable than gold, which will be destroyed even though it is itself tested by fire.) Your genuine faith will result in praise, glory, and honor for you when Jesus Christ is revealed. 8 Although you’ve never seen him, you love him. Even though you don’t see him now, you trust him and so rejoice with a glorious joy that is too much for words. 9 You are receiving the goal of your faith: your salvation..”

**Message “*Learning the Way of Faith: The Victory of Faith*”:** Would you pray with me?

Speak Lord through these lips, however unworthy, the wonderful words of life. Open our minds and hearts to Your message so that we may be transformed. – Amen

Today we conclude our October sermon series on learning the way of faith. We looked first at the trial of faith, when God asked Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac. Abraham obeyed God’s unexpected command because he had a history and a relationship with God; he knew God to be good and trustworthy, therefore he faithfully trusted God’s promises as he obediently and unquestioningly followed His commands. Abraham’s trial of faith is a story about obedience to God.

Then we looked at the discipline of faith. As a loving parent, God not only blesses His children, He disciplines us as well, for our own good. His discipline is a response of His love for us and His desire for each of us to be holy, just as He is holy. The result of His discipline is a stronger faith and a renewed relationship with Him.

We looked next at the patience of faith, and we looked to Job. Job’s perseverance, his patience, stands out because his story is extreme in the amount of suffering he endured. Yet Job never lost his faith in God, even under the most heartbreaking circumstances.

In his letter to Christians under persecution, James used Job as a prime example of the patience of faith in suffering. Just as Job faced many struggles, they too would face hardship in living for God, as do we. The true test of patience comes when we, like Job, we have done nothing to deserve the suffering we face. Patience reveals our faith in God’s purpose, His timing, omnipotence and love.

Job’s experience teaches us that we many never know the specific reason for our suffering in this lifetime, but we still continue to trust in our sovereign, holy and righteous God. Our responsibility to God is to love Him, obey Him, and trust Him, in all circumstances. When we do, we will find God in the midst of our trials. And He will get us through them.

Last week we looked at the courage of faith and at Stephen, the first Christian martyr. Stephen followed the example of his Lord, Jesus Christ. He was a bold evangelist who was not afraid to preach the gospel despite dangerous opposition. His courage came from the Holy Spirit, the same Holy Spirit that lives inside each one of us. His influence was even stronger after his death, for his death had the unexpected consequence of forcing Christians to flee persecution in Jerusalem, thereby spreading the gospel spread far and wide as a result and revealing that, even in tragedy, our God “works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”

Stephen’s life and death is an example of how we as believers should strive to live: courageously committed to the Lord even in the face of death; faithful to preach the gospel boldly; knowledgeable of God’s truth; and willing to be used by God for His plan and purpose, no matter the outcome.

 Today we will look at the victory, or rewards, of faith as described by the apostle Peter. Before we turn to his letter, however, let’s look for a moment at the great faith chapter of the Bible – Hebrews 11.

The chapter opens with a definition of faith in verse one – “Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.” For believers, faith is knowing the reality of things for which we can only hope for now.

For believers, faith leads to certainty of things not yet seen; faith is the certainty that they will be seen. In fact, the writer of Hebrews tells us that “without faith, it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him.”

The author then relates the faith journey of a number of Old Testaments greats, commonly referred to today as “the heroes of faith,” whose lives demonstrated faith in action – people who heard God’s promises and believed them in spite of waiting a very long time and, in many cases, the endurance of great trials, to see God’s promises fulfilled. In some cases, these heroes of faith believed in the promises God made to them even though they never saw these promises fulfilled in their lifetimes.

We hear the stories of Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob and Moses. The stories of the Israelites at the Red Sea, Rahab, Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets among others. Though they were far from perfect, but God chooses to remember their faith rather than their sins; “this is what the ancients were commended for.”

Let’s now turn to our passage from Peter’s first letter. This passage is all about the victory of faith – the rewards of genuine faith. “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In His great mercy He has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade.”

First, Peter’s words offer joy and hope in times of trouble and he bases his confidence on what God has done for us in Jesus Christ. We are called into a living hope of eternal life. Our hope is not only for our future in heaven; eternal life begins here and now, on earth in the present, when we put our trust Christ and join God’s family. There are four rewards of genuine faith listed this passage, and these rewards of faith are present realities. We don’t have to wait for them. They begin in this life and extend all the way into eternity.

When we say faith, we are saying we believe that the Bible is true and what it says about Christ is true. He is the only way to salvation. He is preparing a place for us in heaven; this life is not all there is. Faith has the ability and strength to see past all the pain and suffering in this life, and to hold onto eternity. With faith, we can see the unseen.

The first reward or victory of faith is that faith provides the channel for God’s protective power. “This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.”

Faith in God is a life-saving power. It’s not a feeling – it’s belief in the power of God to save us and change our life completely. Here on earth, we Christians are in hostile territory, under attack from Satan and the world. If we try to do battle on our own strength, without faith in God, we will be quickly defeated and fall into despairing hopelessness. But if we have faith in God and the power of His Word, we know we don’t have to fight on our own strength. We know that God will show Himself strong on our behalf and victory will be ours. For God shields us and keeps us by His power.

Is there any power greater than God’s? Think of the powers on this earth that we sometimes fear or feel we are at the mercy of: acts of nature like tornadoes, wild fires, floods, hurricanes, earthquakes; governments, authorities and agencies, accidents and ill health, diseases and viruses, the economy and unemployment, the actions and bad choices of other people.

These powers or forces only have power because God allows them to have power – and that same power, God’s power, guards us. What does God’s power guard in our lives? In verse 5 Peter tells us that God guards us unto salvation – He guards those who’ve trusted in Christ as Savior to be sure that NOTHING keeps them from receiving salvation.

There are many things that can touch us in this life – sorrow, difficulty, hunger, loss, physical pain, poverty. And sometimes it takes a while for faith to do its work so we remember that God hasn’t abandoned us during those difficult and painful times. He is always with us, His power guarding and protecting us, so that while some things can touch us and our loved ones in this life, nothing can touch our eternal destiny, because God is on guard; we are protected by our heavenly Father who will walk us straight into eternity with Him.

The second reward or victory of faith is genuine faith proves its own worth through trials. It is through trials that what we really believe about God rises to the surface. “In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.”

Peter mentions trials and suffering several times in this letter. We must accept trials as part of the refining process that burns away our impurities and prepares us to meet Christ. Our trials, struggles and persecutions, refine and strengthen our faith, making us useful to God. Instead of asking “Why me?” we should respond with 1) confidence that God knows, plans and directs our lives for the good, leading us toward a better future; 2) perseverance - when facing grief, anger, sorrow and pain; it’s okay to express our emotions, but not to give into bitterness and despair; 3) courage because with Jesus as our Brother and Savior, we need not fear anything. He who suffered and died for us will not abandon us. Jesus carries us through everything.

Verse 6 tells us that our trials are “for a little while,” they are temporary – trials for believers cannot and will not last forever. Even burdens that we bear through the whole of this earthly life are temporary when compared to eternity.

Trials are also of “all kinds,” coming in all shapes and sizes. Today’s trial may be a health issue and tomorrow’s trial may be a financial one. Verse 7 tells us that they come for a reason, to prove the genuineness of our faith so that the ultimate outcome will result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. As we are refined through the trials of faith, our impurities rise to the service and our Lord skims them off so that our purer faith will shine to His praise.

The third reward or victory of faith promotes genuine love for the Savior. “Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy.” Most of the readers of Peter’s letter hadn’t had the benefit of seeing Christ firsthand, but they loved Him! How could that happen? They saw Jesus through the eyes of faith, even as we do.

Even though, like us, they didn’t see or know Christ in their present, faith provided the way for them to experience Him and love Him, which brought “inexpressible and glorious joy,” just as it does for believers today. That is the third reward of faith – it enables us to sincerely love a Savior we haven’t seen. Without faith, it would not be possible to love Christ.

The fourth reward or victory of faith promises the salvation of our souls. “For you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.” The primary goal of faith is to be the channel of God’s saving power in our lives. Verse 9 says that the end result, or goal, of our faith is the salvation of our souls.

God could have chosen other ways as the means to eternal life. But He chose to make the payment for our sins Himself on the cross. He simply states, “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.”

All we need to do is empty ourselves of any thoughts of our own goodness and merit and any thoughts we may have about earning our own way to heaven, and instead reach out in faith to the amazing gift God has given us and receive His Son Jesus as our own Lord and Savior. Those who come to God with nothing to offer but their trust in Jesus to save them are given everything! “In His great mercy God has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade.” Our inheritance is reserved for us in heaven, an inheritance that won’t die or fade away.

There are countless miracles throughout the Bible that God performed through and for the heroes of faith. And yet the greatest miracle, the greatest reward, the greatest victory of all is the miracle of salvation that the God of Love performed in the death and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ, and the miracles of new life and transformation He performs in each person who believes in Him.

Have you made your reservations in heaven yet?

Have you received the Lord Jesus Christ as your personal Savior?

Are you enjoying the rewards, the victories, of a genuine faith – the salvation of your soul? **Would you pray with me?**  Gracious and Loving God,

Thank you for the gift of Your Son, Jesus Christ, the only way to salvation and eternal life, and for the gift of faith, so that we may receive Him and restore relationship with You.

In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen. Our **closing song** is **“Because He Lives”**

**Benediction** **Wherever we are, we are in God. Wherever we are, we are in Christ, and Christ is in us. Wherever we are, the Spirit abides with us and in us. We go forth in peace and hope, upheld by God in every way. Let us go forth in faithfulness and trust. May all see the Divine in and through us. AMEN.**