

Streetsville United Church

Sunday, January 19, 2020

Rev. John Tapscott

## “BECAUSE GOD IS FAITHFUL”

1 Corinthians 1:9

In Yellow Stone National Park in the U.S. there are over two hundred geysers. But one geyser is more popular than all others and not because it reaches the greatest height. It is popular because it is dependable. Once every sixty-five minutes it shoots a stream of boiling water over 170 ft. into the air. You can set your watch by it. They call it "Old Faithful."

There are many things in life that are faithful. The sun faithfully rises every morning and sets every night. The tide faithfully comes in and goes out. Snow falls faithfully every winter in Canada. Sometimes we can say about a person, "There's a faithful man, a faithful woman." But faithful above all else, and all others, is our faithful God.

The faithfulness of God runs throughout the Bible. Lamentations 3:22-23, "The Lord's mercies...are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness." Psalm 100, "Give thanks to him and bless his name. For the LORD is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations." 1 John 1:9, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Rev. 19:11 describes the second coming of Jesus. "Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called "Faithful and True."

In today's passage from 1 Corinthians chapter 1 Paul speaks to those early believers about the grace and faithfulness of God. "I give thanks to my God always because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus." Then he reminds them that it is because of God's faithfulness that they have become Christians and belong to the church. 1 Corinthians 1:9, "God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord." "God is faithful." Those are some of the most comforting, reassuring words in the Bible. Because God is faithful we are the recipients of so many blessings. In verses 7-9 Paul speaks of three blessings that accrue to us because God is faithful.

*First, because God is faithful we will not lack in any spiritual gift.*

Verse 7, "so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ." What Paul means by any spiritual gift is not entirely clear, but he may be speaking of the fruits of the Spirit listed in Galatians 5 – "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control." Because God is faithful we will not lack any spiritual gift we need for living the Christian life. These gifts or fruits were in Christ himself. And God gives to us and develops them in us them in us by the power of the Holy Spirit as we walk with Christ. But let's look specifically at one of them, faithfulness, since that is our theme.

A church secretary took a vacation down south. One day as she was relaxing on the beach under an umbrella, a friendly boy approached her. "Do you read the Bible?" he asked. She wondered what this was all about, but answered, "Yes, every day." "Do you pray?" the boy asked. "Yes," she answered, "morning and night." "Do you go to church on Sunday?" was his third question. "I do," she answered. "In fact, I not only go to church; I work at a church." "Good," the boy said. "Then you can look after my wallet while I go swimming."

People should know Christians not only by our love for one another, but also by our faithfulness and our trustworthiness. King Solomon asked in Proverbs. 20:6, "Most men will proclaim each his own goodness, but who can find a faithful man?" God is looking for faithful men and women. It is a high calling to be a person who keeps their word even when it is personally costly, a person who values the sacred promises she or he has made. We should desire, as followers of the True and Faithful One, to be those people. Faithfulness should be very important to us and it is a gift we will not lack as we keep looking to God in faith and prayer.

My days of performing weddings are almost over, since only ministers actively serving churches have a license to perform weddings. Retired clergy don't qualify. But over the years I have been privileged to perform many weddings, some of them very special. And the significance of the wedding vows has grown on me over the years. "I take you to be my husband...I take you to be my wife...to have and to hold from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, in joy and in sorrow, to love and to cherish, and to be faithful to you alone, as long as we both shall live." Now when a couple say those vows to one another, they're probably not thinking about them too deeply. They're too nervous and emotional. But I emphasize those vows when I meet with a couple for wedding planning. One of the blessings of attending weddings as a guest is that you can reflect on the significance of the vows, more deeply now than when you actually said them to your spouse. They become more meaningful with the passing years.

Someone said that we are the promises we make and the commitments we keep. It's like that line of Sir Thomas More in "A Man for All Seasons". He's in prison for his beliefs. His daughter Meg tries to convince him to waffle on the promises he's made. But he tells her: "When a person makes a promise, Meg, he puts himself in his hands like water. And if he opens his fingers to let it go, he need not hope to find himself again!" Who are you? You're known by the promises you keep. That's who you are. It's a matter of character.

If we desire faithfulness, God will not leave us lacking. For God himself is faithful. God keeps his word. His promises can be trusted. God promised to send a Saviour to meet our deepest need. And he did, by not withholding his own Son, but giving him to us and even giving him up for our sake. Faithfulness is God's character, and he works by his Spirit so that his character is reflected in ours. Because God is faithful you and I will not lack in any spiritual gift that we truly need and desire.

*Secondly, because God is faithful, we will make it to the end.*

Paul writes, “He will also strengthen you to the end.” (v. 8) Isn’t that something we wonder about, perhaps even worry about? Will we make it to the end of our earthly days with our faith intact? Will we be ready to meet the Lord? Well, Paul says, fear not, for he will strengthen you to the end. The faithful God is strengthening us to run the race with perseverance.

But you say - what about all those who have dropped out of the race? The sidelines are full of people who once attended church but no longer do so. Well, this may sound harsh but perhaps they were not really Christians to begin with. Perhaps they never really heard God’s call into the fellowship of Christ. Perhaps they never really believed in their hearts that God raised Jesus Christ from the dead, and confessed with their lips that Jesus is Lord. But if you have done that, then God made a covenant with you. You belong to him in life, in death, in life beyond death. He will never fail you or forsake you. He will keep you strong in faith to the end. He will keep you looking unto Jesus. He will feed you in the sacrament and strengthen you through his word. God is faithful and he will do this.

And God has not forgotten about those people who are on the sidelines. He is still calling them into the fellowship of his Son. He is still seeking ways to get them back in the race. He is still striving with them by his Spirit. And we hope and pray that they will hear and respond to his call.

When I was in first year university I complained to my cousin during Christmas vacation about how tough university was. I said, “I don’t know whether I’ll make it.” She was in 4<sup>th</sup> year and I remember her saying, “You’ll get there. You’ll make it. We all do, or most of us anyway.” Well I did, but it was only by the grace of God that I passed my first year courses. The following year I adjusted my courses and my ambitions. Things got better from then on. In fact, it was during that first year that God began growing some seeds he had planted in me about ministry. It was still years before those seeds really blossomed, but God was at work in my life. God works in wonderful and mysterious ways.

Yes, living the Christian life can be tough in this world, but God is faithful. He will strengthen you to the end. By his grace, you and I will make it, strong in Christ, strong in faith and hope and love.

*Finally, because God is faithful, you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Verse 8. “He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Paul is speaking of the day on which Christ will come again as judge. Now it is hard to believe that gentle Jesus meek and mild, the Bethlehem babe, the crucified carpenter of Nazareth, is coming again to judge the world. But he is. Acts tells us that Jesus is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead. He is coming to complete God’s work of making all things new. Christ will bring the Kingdom in all it’s fullness, the Kingdom which began to dawn victoriously over all creation on resurrection morning. On that third day, the powers of sin and evil and death were decisively defeated. The Risen Christ is victor. He is Lord and King and Judge of all.

Now the prospect of standing before the holy judge may seem frightening. But the good news is that, as Acts says, “all the prophets testify about Christ that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sin through his name.” In fact, we can say that Jesus’ first coming as Saviour was to prepare us for his second coming as judge. On the Cross Jesus took our sin and guilt and blame upon himself and gives his righteousness to all who believe. So if you and I are trusting in him we will be found blameless on that day. Even those times of our unfaithfulness are covered by his precious blood. It’s amazing grace. God is faithful to his word and that’s what his word promises - you will be found blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

One Christian said another. “I saw a sign the other day which said, ‘Prepare to meet your God.’ That seems like a foolish way of witnessing. Trying to threaten people.” His friend replied, “You see those words as a threat. I see them as a glorious hope. How marvellous to meet our God - the God of creation, the God of Jesus, the God of love and mercy! I’m prepared, excited!”

And so should we, who have been called into the fellowship of God’s Son. Because of God’s faithfulness you and I will be found blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. When the saints go marching in, you and I will be in that number! God is faithful. Great indeed is his faithfulness.