

The Second Sunday after Pentecost
June 13-14, 2009
2 Corinthians 5:6-17

“Walking by Faith”

Joe Smith (not his real name) was an older man who was preparing to leave his home and move into a retirement community. He and his wife were original owners and occupants of the home they had built when their neighborhood was still out in the country. They had raised their children in that house over many years, enjoying family milestones like birthdays, holidays, graduations, weddings, and grandchildren. Joe and his wife had celebrated their golden anniversary in that house, reflecting on a lifetime of memories together. When his wife passed away, Joe was alone but still managed. Although his children and grandchildren checked in on him regularly to make sure he was okay, it was becoming clear to Joe that it was time to say goodbye to his beloved home and move into something more manageable. So, he talked it over with his children and arrangements were made for him to move into the new retirement community not too far away. Going through everything in the house and deciding what to keep, what to share with his family, what to sell or give away, was not easy but they did it. As Joe was making final preparations to leave his home, he remembered something he and his wife had often talked about: planting a scarlet maple tree in the corner of the front yard. He felt this was a piece of unfinished business that he needed to take care of, so he contacted a local nursery and days before he was to move the tree was planted. As it was being planted, his daughter happened to come by the house and was surprised to see this; her dad hadn't told her what he was doing. When she asked her dad, he explained that this was something her mother and him had often talked about but had never done. He wanted to honor her life and their life together with the planting of this scarlet maple. “But, Dad, you're moving. You'll never see the tree grow up to maturity. What's the point?” He told his daughter, “You're right. I'll never see this tree grow to its full height. I'll never see its beautiful fall colors or know the shade it will provide in the summer. I'll never know any of those things, but someone will.” Nodding her head, his daughter understood what her father said. She took his hand and together they watched as the tree was planted. Joe Smith was walking by faith that someone after him would be blessed through the planting of this tree.

“Walking by Faith” is the title of a summer preaching series that begins today. Week by week, we will focus on what it means for us today to walk by faith as disciples of Jesus. Week by week, the message will focus on the Second (Epistle) Lesson in the worship service. For the first few weeks, that lesson comes from Paul the apostle's second letter to the Corinthians. As this series begins today, the theme for today's message is the same as the series theme: “Walking by Faith.” May the Lord's rich blessing rest upon the preaching, the hearing, and the living of his Word, for Jesus' sake.

Walking by faith is not easy – let's put that up front first. It certainly was not easy for Paul, the author of 2 Corinthians. He left his old life behind after encountering the risen Lord Jesus on the road to Damascus, and life for him was never the same. He endured much for the sake of the Gospel (1 Cor. 4:9-13; 2 Cor. 4:7-12), but counted it all joy and a high privilege to be called by Christ to preach and teach the grace and mercy which are found only in Him. That grace and mercy shine in Paul's words in today's Second Reading: **“For the love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. And he died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them”** (2 Cor. 5:14-15). Our walking by faith is grounded in what God in Christ has done for us, turning us from self-centered concern to concern for Christ. On bumper stickers

and bracelets, we'll often see these four letters: "WWJD." They stand for "What would Jesus do?" As we walk by faith, this is the question to ask ourselves; not what do I want, or how will this benefit me? But what would Jesus do? What would Jesus have me do? Before we can ask "WWJD" (what would Jesus do?) we first have to ask "WDJD" – what did Jesus do? We can't put the cart before the horse here. God's redeeming work in Jesus – **"he died for all"** – must come before any action on our part – **"those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them."** In Christian theology, the **"he died for all"** part is what is called justification – how we are made right with God through Jesus' atoning death upon the cross, WDJD – what did Jesus do? The **"those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them"** part is what's called sanctification – how in response to Jesus' atoning death, the Spirit is at work in us to live as Jesus' disciples, WWJD – what would Jesus do? What would Jesus have me do? These must be in their proper order: justification first, sanctification second. Walking by faith is sanctification; becoming more Christ-like through the power of the Holy Spirit at work in us through Word and Sacrament.

Walking by faith is not easy, and at times it sets us at odds with the world around us. Like Paul, we also will have struggles, difficulties, and challenges because of our faith in Jesus. We need the support and encouragement of fellow believers to walk by faith. We need each other in order to walk by faith. As our congregation comes together today to hear reports on ministry and mission, to elect new leaders, to plan for the year ahead, as we plan for the calling of a Spanish Language Mission Developer, we walk by faith, remembering that **"... if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away, everything has become new!"** (2 Cor. 5:17). By God's amazing grace, we are that new creation in Christ by water and the Word, called to walk by faith, not always knowing where our journey of faith will take us in this life, but trusting with full confidence that Christ himself is leading us and his redeeming love is supporting us. So, let the journey begin as we walk by faith. May God help us to do this, for Jesus' sake. Amen.