



## MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

[www.mzluth.org](http://www.mzluth.org)

June 27, 2010

5<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

Sermon Text: [Hebrews 11:24-26](#)

Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: [Genesis 17:6b-12, 16-23](#)

Psalm of the Day: [Psalm 22](#)

Second Lesson: [Hebrews 11:24-26](#)

Gospel Lesson: [Luke 9:18-24](#)

### **Is Faithfulness Worth the Trouble It Brings?**

A Short Term Answer of the Flesh

The Eternal Truth of Faith

Looks can be deceiving at times, right? You know that to be true, don't you? I'll give you an example...about 30 years ago from this Spring, I was in the Michigan Lutheran Seminary's Concert Choir. We went to Florida on a Choir tour. If you are wondering how I made the touring Choir...they didn't cut any men. While we were down there, it was pretty warm. When you saw us march in and stand in the risers in the front and sing, you'd see our gowns, and it looked like every single one of the men there was wearing pants, but they weren't. Looks were deceiving. A number of them had shorts on and they had elastic put into some cut-off pant legs that they wore so it wouldn't be quite so hot underneath those gowns. Looks at times can be deceiving.

But looks at times can cause us to ask questions, right? You can look at something and say, "Did I really see what I just saw?" Yesterday I was at ball games a lot of the day. I saw one young person there whose shirt was really long. When I first saw them walk by, I wondered if they were even wearing pants. They were, but it made me question it. The shirt was so long and the shorts were so short it looked like they were walking around in a shirt and forgot to put on their pants.

It's the same way in our life of faith. Looks can be deceiving, but looks can cause us to question things. Things that we see as we live and we seek to serve our God can cause us to question things. As we consider what all of our readings are talking about today, the question that comes up as we live to serve the God who has saved us through his life and death is, is faithfulness worth the trouble it brings?

Look at what I just read to you. It brought Moses a lot of trouble, right? What we read about Joseph brought Joseph a lot of trouble, right? The Psalm we sang was the words of the Messiah, 1,000 years before he was born. Look at the trouble that being faithful to what he was sent to do brought to him. Then in our Gospel we heard Jesus tell us, "If you are going to be faithful to me, you are going to have to take up a cross...daily...and carry it." It's going to be hard at times. It's going to be difficult. We are going to suffer attacks when we are doing the right thing before God because sinful natures don't like the right thing before God. So is it worth it?

Is it worth it to lose friends? Is it worth it to be mocked and ridiculed? Is it worth it to lose a promotion? There are two obvious answers, right? The short-term answer and

the long-term answer. This morning we see how Moses, by faith, as we are told in that great “heroes of faith” “Hall of Fame of Faith” chapter, Hebrews 11, how by faith Moses looked beyond the short-term answer and focused on the eternal truth that he knew was his because of his faith in his Savior God.

But think about this...if someone came up to you with the choice today of living in the mansions of the Hamptons or in a third-world country in a hut...those are your two choices. There’s no in between. Which are you going to choose? Are you going to think about it for awhile?

Isn’t that exactly what Moses’ choices were? Live in the palace and be known as the son of Pharaoh’s daughter and all of the things that went with it in the world power of its day, to have all the power, the prestige and everything else that would have gone with it, or go with the slaves who were making the bricks. Humanly speaking, if you are an outsider looking at Moses’ choice you would think he was nuts, wouldn’t you? Who in the world would choose to go live as a slave? Who in the world would choose to be mistreated? Who in the world would deny themselves everything that being a part of Pharaoh’s household would have offered...the food, the banquets, the parties, the prestige, the power. As you walked along, people would have to respect him and honor him. But if he leaves that and goes and lives among the slaves, people can beat him with impunity. We are told that by faith Moses chose to be with God’s people so he could be closer to God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time, as the Holy Spirit calls it.

The short-term answer is obvious to our human eyes. The long-term answer is obvious only to the eyes of faith. We are told he chose that because he was looking ahead to his reward. He saw that disgrace for the sake of Christ, not disgrace for the sake of the fact that he made bad choices like when he killed that Egyptian. He sinned against his God. Disgrace for that was not for the sake of Christ. That was disgrace for the sake of Moses. But disgrace for the sake of Christ means doing what is right before God and then suffering for it. Disgrace for the sake of Christ is an apt description of the cross that we as Christians are to daily pick up and carry...living for Christ no matter how others might react. But sometimes it isn’t even the pleasures of sin that distract us or change our focus and make us want to go down that path. Sometimes it’s the absence of difficulty that is the pleasure of sin that we embrace and we walk down that path.

For instance, have you ever had a close friend or a family member caught up in some sin? Have you ever gone and said, “I’m really concerned about you and how you walk with Christ” and lovingly and gently and patiently said, “I want you to turn away from this sin and turn back to God and walk closer to your God because I’m really worried about your spiritual health.” Have you ever lost that friend? Have you ever had a family member upset with you? Have you ever said to yourself, “That’s not worth it. I’m never doing it again?” Isn’t that choosing the pleasure of sin for a short time and your own comfort over the eternal truth of who Christ is and what Christ has done for you and for that other person? Or has even the fear, even the thought, the possibility that you might lose that friend kept you from even going and having that conversation? Then

you comfort yourself with, "That's someone else's job. Maybe the pastor should do that. Maybe if I tell someone else, they'll go do it and then I can blame them instead of doing what God has called me to do." God has pretty clearly said if a brother sins against you, go and show him his fault just between the two of you. But that's not easy. That's difficulty and our sinful minds will come up with 3,001 reasons why we shouldn't do it. But God has said this is our task.

If we are honest with ourselves, each and every one of us here has chosen the pleasures of sin either in that way or in embracing some kind of activity that we know is wrong before God, but we think it's going to make us happy, and God certainly wants me to be happy, doesn't he? God wants you to be happy the way he defines happiness, which is being close to him knowing that he has lived and died to take away your sins and then living in response to that and serving him and thanking him that he has taken away your sins.

You and I can twist a lot of things around so that the short-term answer makes much more sense. You and I can deny it. We can kind of buck against it. We can kind of give all the reasons why it's someone else's job, but the answer that's obvious is that you and I are filthy rotten sinners and we have offended our God. We have chosen the short-term answer. We have chosen the pleasures of sin at times.

Because of that sin, we should be condemned to hell. No ifs, ands or buts. No "Yeah, but I did it once and this person hasn't ever done it so God has to love me more." No. God says sin equals death, eternal death in hell.

But then you and I know the rest of the story, don't we? What makes short-term disgrace or difficulty of greater value than the treasures of Egypt or whatever else we might choose is who our God is and what he has done for us. He didn't love us because he knew that we would do something for him. He didn't love us and live and die in our place to take away our sins because he knew that some day we would do him a favor. There's no manipulating God or God owing us. God did it while we were still sinners, while we were separated from him, while we were hating him. In the sinfulness of our own sinful nature without faith in God, that's what we are. While that's what we are, while that's what the world was, God promised a Savior. And while people were still being conceived in that sin and still living in that sin, God sent the Savior. Then that Savior lived in our place perfectly because we are imperfect. He never chose the short-term solution or the short-term pleasure. He kept our eternal benefit in front of his eyes and he lived perfectly. Then he died with all the times that you and I have screwed up...on his back. Then he rose again. Then he ascended. And while we are still sinners, he sends the Holy Spirit into our lives through the Word and the Sacraments to strengthen us and to sustain us.

Did you notice that verse in the hymn that we just sang? "Your Word and Sacrament O Lord, may they always be our strength and our comfort. May they be our only strength and comfort." And here's why...God's Word and his Sacraments are certain. They aren't subjective. They are an objective truth. It tells us who God is and what he has

done. How I feel about God...that changes every day, doesn't it? Depending on how much sleep I have, depending on what I am like, what my life is like, or what my day is like, my emotions go up and down. If I'm going to depend on how I feel about God, quite often my feelings are all screwed up because I obviously at times choose the pleasures of sin for a short time instead of serving God. That's why our strength is in God, in his promises, in his Word and in his Sacraments. That's why knowing his Word better is so important. That's why immersing ourselves in his Sacraments, in the Lord's Supper and daily reminders of our Baptism, are so important to us as Christians because there we see objective truth that is unchanging and that is eternal.

God loves us. God has promised that all things work out for our good whether you and I understand how that could be or not. I'm sure Joseph wasn't thrilled that he was thrown in prison, but God used that for the eternal good of many, many people and for the physical good of the children of Israel.

God's got a plan. Sometimes you and I just have to trust that plan. Even when we carry out his plan and it brings us difficulty or persecution, you and I need to say, "God, you're more important and I'm more worried about what you think about me than I am about what anyone else thinks about me. I want to thank you for your salvation." Our living for God doesn't cause him to love us. We live for him because he loved us first. And his love is absolutely perfect and it sustains us through all difficulties.