



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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September 2, 2012

Pentecost 14

Sermon Text: [Hebrews 11:24-28](#)

Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: [Exodus 7:8-13](#)

Psalm of the Day: [Psalm 71](#)

Second Lesson: [Hebrews 11:24-28](#)

Gospel Lesson: [John 6:60-69](#)

Set Aside Intellect By Faith

Faith sees the long term picture

Faith sees what can't be seen

Faith sees what can't be understood

Grace, mercy and peace are yours from God our Father through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

In life there are some questions we don't really struggle with a whole lot. Immediately we know the answer to them. You children here, if your parents say, "What do you want to do, have a second bowl of ice cream or a second piece of dessert? Or do you want to go clean your bedroom?" You're not thinking about it, are you? If you're an adult and the choice before you is sweeping the floors at a multibillion dollar company or owning the multibillion dollar company, you probably aren't thinking twice about which you would want if you had the choice, right? There are certain things like that your intellect does not struggle with at all. Yet sometimes our intellect can really get in the way.

Some people take that same kind of logic and apply it to matters that have to do with God. God is beyond our reason. Reason does not enable us to be drawn to the Father. Only the Father can draw us to Christ. Reason does not enable us to accept the truths of the Spirit. Only the Spirit enables us to accept the truths of the Spirit. This leads people at times to challenge their faith.

Maybe you've heard something along these lines... if God is a God of love, then how can he let children die of cancer? I can't believe in a God that would allow something like that to happen. Is that statement understandable according to your human reason? Sure. But is it Scriptural? No. It begins with this basic premise that we're all good, that we are not sinners, and that sin has not ruined the perfect world that God has created. When you remember that Scripture teaches us that we're all sinners and that we live in a sinful world, the world is not going to always be what we think it should be.

In the Second Lesson that I read to you, as we learn about Moses from that great chapter of faith, Hebrews 11, we see Moses show us that faith means we set aside our intellect and we do it by faith. By faith we believe what God says even when our intellect says that's not right. You and I might think that's pretty straightforward and that as Christians we know that, but the truth is that you and I struggle with that all the time. We struggle with these questions in ways that we might not even recognize.

We have different things that are brought before us that are lies of Satan that sometimes we, as Christians, even buy into. We need to understand that and recognize that and see how we need to also, like Moses, set aside our intellect by faith. What we can learn from Moses this morning is that by faith we focus on the long-term picture, not just the immediate results or the immediate things that are right in front of us. You and I aren't good at that at all, are we? We're not good at long-term anything. We live in an immediate culture. Everything shows up on the internet immediately on all the different news sites, etc. We're not in a 24-hour news cycle anymore. We're in about a 2-hour news cycle. We are in a very immediate culture. We want it now. That's why baseball has gone from America's pastime to an afterthought for many sports fans. It goes too slow. It takes too long. To learn to set aside our intellect and focus on the long-term picture, that is going to take some work for you and me.

Faith also sees what can't be seen. We see that in Moses. That takes faith. That's the very essence of faith, the definition of faith. Faith sees what even can't be understood, which is the essence of setting aside your intellect. If you can't understand it, forget it. You aren't the king and lord of everything. You're a sinful human wretch and you aren't going to understand everything. But our intellect doesn't want to accept that truth. So how in the world could Moses do it?

I was in the store yesterday and there was a long checkout line. One of the princes of the royal family in England, I don't know which one, I don't pay attention to that stuff, evidently has been pretty stupid lately and did a lot of foolish things. Some pictures have shown up of this guy from some party he was at and he was doing some things he shouldn't have been doing. I don't really know a lot about it, but as I was reading all that I thought it was kind of interesting because that kind of relates to Moses. In his day, Moses was kind of like those princes, the prince of England or a Saudi prince. That was the world power. That was where the money was. That was where the power was. That was where everything was. And here's Moses, he left Egypt when he was 40. Think about it, from the time he's 20 or 30, somewhere around there, here's a guy who was raised by the princess. He is in the royal family and he is surrounded by all these things, all these temptations that a young man would face. So when it talks about how he chose to be mistreated with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time, we aren't talking about one or two of the pleasures of sin. We are talking about everything the pleasures of sin had to offer at that time and in that place. This guy would have had it all. He was surrounded by temptations to overindulge in everything. Instead, he chose to be mistreated with the slaves.

Think about this from a human standpoint for a minute. If this God of the Israelites is so wonderful, why are they slaves? Humanly speaking wouldn't Moses say, "god Rah" (or whatever god was in power at that time in Egypt), "he's where it's at because their god has allowed them to be slaves and we're the slave masters. Obviously we are better." Human intellect says that, right? Instead, Moses focuses on the promises of the Savior, the promises that have been passed down about how we are sinners and yet God has promised to send someone to take away our sin. He focuses on that and chooses to be mistreated with slaves rather than be the slave owner. That's the setting

aside of intellect, right? That's saying "My focus is on not what I can see right now but on the long-term benefit of being close to my God even if it involves going through suffering and hardship now for a time. I don't want to wander away from him. I don't want to stray from him because I might never find my way back."

Moses in his faith clung to the Savior. Even though he couldn't see the reward he would get and he could clearly see the treasures of Egypt that were in front of him, he regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt because he was looking ahead to his reward. He was looking at what he couldn't see. He was looking at the long term. He didn't know the banquets of heaven yet. He didn't know what God had to offer him, but he believed God's promise that it was better than any pleasures of sin for a short time.

Think of how often you and I don't make that decision to set aside our intellect and cling to our faith. How often do you and I focus on the short-term picture, the pleasures that are in front of us, on what we deserve, on what we've earned. "We deserve this." "So maybe my spouse isn't treating me the way they should, so I should go out and have an affair because I deserve it." We choose the pleasures of sin instead of staying close to our Savior. Or we choose the pleasures of sin and doing what we want when God has said, "Hey, don't do this. It's sin. Don't gossip about that person. It's sin." We choose the pleasures of that short-term gratification of making ourselves feel better about ourselves by running down someone else. That's not as bad as the others, is it? Get over it; it's sin. It should send you to hell. That's what God says. Don't rationalize your sins. See them for what they are. They are something that should make you burn in hell forever. You and I often choose those short-term pleasures even when we know better what God has said, because we are sinful wretches.

We don't always walk in faith. All too often we walk in sight. We walk in the sight of what is going to benefit us or what is going to make us feel better in the short term. We walk by sight of what we can see instead of focusing on the One who is invisible, which is God, the One who has loved us and redeemed us.

Last week I sat in the Wolves Den, the gym of the Wilmot Wolves in South Dakota. They had an interesting mural of a wolves den staring across from the visitors' seats. I thought that was kind of interesting. I liked that. On the side wall they had a little banner hanging up from the Fellowship of Christian Athletes that evidently meets in the school. There are a lot of things in the Fellowship of Christian Athletes that they are messed up on and have wrong from Scripture. I understand that. It's not a group I would want to join because of where they are wrong, but they had this right. Hanging on that banner was their slogan, "Performing for an audience of One." That One would be your God, your Savior. You aren't performing for your parents when you're an athlete. You aren't performing for the ref and just being good when the ref is watching. You aren't doing it just for your coach. Really you are performing for an audience of One, your Savior.

Think of how true that is and how that applies that we perform for an audience that is invisible as we go through life. You and I forget that. Too often we focus on what we can see. I'll give you an example of that. Sometimes I'll run into people I haven't seen in church in a long time, maybe at a grocery store. I say "Hi. How are you? How have you been?" Things like that. Often what comes pouring out is all the reasons why they haven't been able to be in church lately. "We have the cabin up north. We can't let that go. We have to go there on the weekend. Then during the week, we can't make it on Thursday. We can't do this. We can't do that. We have tickets. We have to use those tickets up. We paid a lot of money for those." It just spills out and goes on and on and on. I smile in the appropriate places and say, "That's nice" or "That's too bad." But in reality I probably should just say, "Don't tell me this. Tell God this. You don't have to excuse yourself to me. You're not performing for an audience of me or anyone else. You're performing for God." We all too often focus on the visible and forget the invisible.

Moses was able to set aside his intellect because he focused more on the invisible. Not always, not perfectly. He was a sinner like us. But the better you and I get at focusing on the invisible, the better we get at focusing on the long-term picture, the better we will be able to focus on what God says even when we can't understand it.

See what the writer to the Hebrews points us to here. "By faith Moses kept the Passover, the sprinkling of blood, so the destroyer of the firstborn would not touch the firstborn of Israel." God comes to you and tells you "I'm going to kill the firstborn of every animal and every person in Egypt, but here is how I am going to spare you. I am going to send the angel of the Lord who is going to kill all these people. But here is how I'll spare you. Go find a lamb that is a year-old male, perfect, no defect. Don't give me your worst. Give me your best. Slaughter it. Sprinkle the blood on the doorpost. Then I'll pass over and I won't kill you." Okay, that makes sense. It's Tuesday. That's usually what I do on Tuesday, right?

Humanly speaking, that doesn't make any sense, does it? It doesn't stand to reason, yet Moses believed it. Moses believed what God said, even when it made no sense. A little lamb blood on the door and the angel of the Lord won't kill you. There's no reasonable expectation to believe any of that. Yet by faith, because he had gotten better at focusing on what he couldn't see and focusing on the long-term picture, instead of focusing on the king's wrath and focusing on the One who is invisible, that is God, he was able to say "Okay. Yes Lord. That's what I'll do."

The writer to the Hebrews could have gone on and on for Moses' life because all those times when he was leading them through the wilderness, time and again he had to set aside his own intellect. He didn't always do it perfectly, but he had to set aside his own intellect and hit a rock with a stick in order to get water. He had to do these things over and over and over throughout his life. Here's the danger. We get to the point where we think, "You know what? I'm smarter than that now. That's for other people. That's not for me."

Did you notice what we sang in the Psalm today? Did you pay attention as you were singing the Psalm? “Since youth, O Lord, you have taught me.” We sang that, didn’t we? Since youth, O Lord. If you don’t believe me, look it up during the Offering. Psalm 71. Go back to it and look it up. “Since youth, O Lord, you have taught me.” Think about that phrase, “since youth you have taught me.” It didn’t say in youth you taught me. It said “since youth.” The Psalm is telling you that God’s desire is that you constantly are growing in your faith, that you get closer to the One who is invisible, that you get closer to the One who makes these promises and keeps these promises, that you didn’t just do it and now that’s done and you go around the rest of your life quoting what your 5th or 6th grade teacher taught you. If that’s where you are, God have mercy on your soul because Satan isn’t stopping with trying to use your intellect to assault your faith. It’s constant. It’s nonstop. The only way you are going to face that constant barrage of “you Christians are just backwards fools and you really should be smarter” is if you are close through Word and Sacrament to your Savior.

For all the times that you have not been close, for all the times you have neglected Word and Sacrament, those are sins. Christ died for those sins. For all the times that you have failed to set aside your intellect and you have gotten angry at God and shook your fist at him and said “Why would you let this happen to me? I love you and I have served you, yet you haven’t taken care of me the way you should,” that’s sin. Christ died for that sin. For all the times you’ve focused on short-term pleasure and set aside what you knew was right and did what God said “don’t do that,” that’s sin, Christ died for that sin.

You need Word and Sacrament, not only to assure you of your forgiveness, but to shape your thinking, your attitude and your focus. By nature your focus is going to be messed up, but through the Spirit working in Word and Sacrament, he can refocus your attention so that you are able to set aside intellect as he strengthens your faith through Word and through Sacrament. Amen.