

## **Faith Matters – # 23 – “By Faith” – November 5, 2017**

Words have a life. That is, there is a moment in history when each new word is born. That word grows up as it relates to people and situations. And depending on who writes it, to whom, how and when, it develops new meanings over the centuries. That is true for the word “faith”. In early O.T. days, faith meant relating to what is stable, trustable, believable, and true. Its most frequent use was its Hebrew word “Amen”, a response that means “that’s the truth”, or “so be it”.

When early Greek thinkers arrived, faith focused on philosophy. They debated whether faith meant belief in the gods or humans. The arrival of Jesus brought more change. For the first time, humans could call the all-powerful God by a new name: “Abba”, “Dad”. So faith in this God of love had a new slant. It was still a matter of belief in and trust, but it reflected the generosity of the God of love, a giving God.

Thanks to the leading of the Holy Spirit, the Apostle Paul taught that faith was one of God’s many gifts freely given to us. “By grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God – not the result of works.”<sup>1</sup>

Sadly the Church discovered that by selling what they called indulgences, one could acquire forgiveness of sins by purchasing indulgences and by working at acts of religious piety. The construction of cathedrals, monasteries, and St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome, was paid for by such financial transactions. This angered the Augustinian monk, Martin Luther who on October 31<sup>st</sup>, 1517, 500 years ago, challenged the official teachings of the Church. His pamphlets, translations of Scripture into the language of the people, and his commentaries spread widely thanks to the prior invention of printing. They restored Scripture’s teaching about faith and contributed to the Protestant Reformation.

And so to this day, Paul teaches us that: “We have come to believe in Christ Jesus, so that we might be justified by faith in Christ”<sup>1</sup>. “In Christ Jesus, you are all children of God through faith.”<sup>2</sup> “Since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>3</sup> Now, after 4000 years, faith signifies our “Yes” to the Word of God. To this, we can heartily say, “AMEN”.

(by Rev. Willard Pottinger, Erskine Presbyterian Church, Hamilton)

<sup>1</sup> Ephesians 2:8. <sup>2</sup> Galatians 2:16. <sup>3</sup> 3:26. <sup>4</sup> Romans 5:1