

Advent Lutheran Church  
Living by Faith  
May 25, 2025  
Galatians 1:13-17, 2:11-21

I've always lived in places where people primarily get around by car, rather than walking or using public transportation. Here in the Dallas – Arlington – Fort Worth area we rely heavily on personal vehicles, so I've become accustomed to this way of life.

I purchased a new SUV this week. That probably doesn't sound like big news, but, for me, it is.

Since I drive a lot, I trust my vehicle to get me where I need to go. Each time I drive down the road, I also place my trust in the drivers that surround me. For example, I expect them to drive on the right side of the road and expect those sharing my side of the road to stay in their lanes.

Put differently, when it comes to life on the road, I am a person of faith. I believe in the system and am grateful that others also believe. Further, I expect it to work as designed – at least most of the time.

This week, my faith has grown like never before because my new SUV is my first electric vehicle. I'm someone who after nearly 50 years of learning still struggles to grasp how gas-powered vehicles work so I can assure that after 5 days with an electric vehicle I'm clueless about how it operates. I do, however, have faith that when I turn it on it will go.

Friends, this morning I'm not here to talk about how new vehicles or new automotive technology are impacting us. I am, however, here to talk about something that unites all people: faith.

People live by faith. Christians, certainly. Religious people more generally, of course. But, even non-religious folks live by faith.

All of us live by faith every day, even if we don't always call it that. Even the most skeptical person exercises faith in science, systems, relationships, and themselves.

Faith is everywhere. It's how life works. We trust in countless things, often without giving them any real thought. Yet somehow, when it comes to God, people often assume faith is irrational or blind. The reality is quite different. Those of us who follow the Way of Jesus live by faith – a deep and abiding faith in our holy and triune God.

Our Christian faith is not wishful thinking. It is a highly relational act of trust. And, it is the focus of this morning's reading from the book of Galatians.

Galatians is a relatively short book. You could easily read all six chapters in one sitting.

It's perhaps Paul's first epistle. In this letter to the churches in Galatia, Paul emphasizes that salvation is by grace and comes through faith in Jesus. It isn't something anyone can merit or earn, which was what I focused on in the children's message. And if that message sounds rather Lutheran, you'd be right.

Martin Luther was particularly fond of Galatians. He's known to have said, "The Epistle to the Galatians is my epistle, to which I have wedded myself. It is my Katherine." And, yes, this was Martin Luther comparing the Epistle of Galatians to his wife.<sup>1</sup>

A contemporary translation renders Galatians 2:16 in this way: We know very well that we are not set right with God by rule-keeping but only through personal faith in Jesus Christ.<sup>2</sup>

As we transition from the school year to summer, it is a good time to get back to the basics. And, this verse provides a solid start.

I wonder what living by faith means to you.

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<sup>1</sup> Variations of this quote are widely used in introductions to Galatians.

<sup>2</sup> The Message.

I've been your interim pastor now for eleven months. In that time, I've started to get to know many of you. It's been long enough that we've celebrated together, grieved together, and dreamed together. And, it's been long enough that we've seen the humanity in one another.

Most importantly, it's been long enough to notice just how often you act on your faith.

It is apparent in the ways you care for one another during seasons of illness and challenge. It's clear in the ways you value our young people and welcome their contributions, including their inspirational leadership in worship last week. And, it's unmistakable in the ways folks answer the call to help – whether bringing a dish to share, moving pews, installing cabinets, or serving in any of our many ongoing ministries.

I've been speaking about the ways you live out your faith when surrounded by others who are part of the Advent family, but I'm reminded that this is just the tip of the iceberg. You are always – at all times and in all places – people of faith. Every action and every interaction are opportunities to express this portion of your identity to the world.

This morning we established that being human requires us to have faith. And, we've considered that as Christians our ultimate faith should be grounded in Christ.

Which brings me to an important detail in the verse I mentioned, verse 16. The translation we use here at Advent – the NIV – is closer to the Greek. For context I'll include the preceding verse

We who are Jews by birth and not sinful Gentiles know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ.

We are justified not by works but faith. And by faith in Jesus. Or by the faith of Jesus.

The Greek here could be read either way. In fact, plenty of scholars argue that only one or the other – their preferred choice – is right.

I wonder if perhaps we need to hear both messages. I'm certain that both are theologically sound.

The option you all know well and expect to hear is straightforward: we are justified by our faith in Jesus. It emphasizes our action.

The option that may be new for you, however, is also straightforward: we are justified by the faith of Jesus. It emphasizes Jesus' nature and clearly moves away from human merit, merit that could include but certainly shouldn't be limited to obedience to the law.

Here's the good news: both ways are all about Jesus. Whether we emphasize our trust in Christ or Christ's trust on our behalf, the message is the same: we are justified by grace, through faith.

In the end, Paul's overall message isn't about rigid doctrine. Instead, it's about relationship, about trust, and about letting go of the need to prove ourselves.

Whether you are in the "faith in Jesus" camp, the "faith of Jesus" group or someone who feels that both offer wisdom to those who follow the Way of Jesus, we can all agree that faith is the foundation of the Christian life.

We are people who live by faith. Yes, we need the general sort of everyday faith that all people have – a faith that makes life in a world filled with some 7 billion other people possible. And yes, I'll lean into that sort of faith when I go to the parking lot in a bit and turn on my new SUV.

As Christians, we must also be people who live by a very specific sort of faith – a faith that centers Jesus and that embodies his teachings.

We are and increasingly becoming a people who lead lives built not on rules, but on love; not on fear, but on trust; and not on exclusion, but on belonging.

Siblings in Christ, it is my hope that we will go from this place to live our faith 24/7, seeing and honoring Jesus in every neighbor and in ourselves.

Amen.