

How do we have faith in Jesus when the world seems to be topsy turvy?

This is an important question as we begin a 4-week message series on faith.

As we heard last Sunday, faith is utter trust in God.

Such trust is grounded in God's faithfulness to his Word.

God fulfills his promises and keeps his Word.

Faith lives in that conviction, even when there is no evidence.

It is easy to have faith when things are going well – when it seems like God is doing everything we want according to our plan.

It is harder to have faith when things are not going well

- when people are dying of starvation,
- terrorists are bombing public places,
- and cancer comes to roost in our circle of friends and family.

Why doesn't God do something?

How can we believe in a God who allows such suffering? Such evil?

The difficulty is that we see things from our limited perspective

– from the brief span of time we can comprehend.

To trust in God in times of trouble means surrendering our personal sense of justice to God so that his justice might be accomplished.

And we might not live to see it.

Or we might live to see it and experience it as the terrible judgment of God for sin, as Jeremiah did.

But judgment is also the hallmark of a faithful God.

God says what he means and means what he says.

And for those who trust Jesus, judgment never has the final say.

Humble yourselves under God's mighty hand and he will lift you up in due time.

Jesus is the final Word – his death and resurrection are our hope.

God's mercy always has the last word.

That, too, is God's faithfulness.

In both judgment and mercy we have to do with God who proves his worthiness of our trust.

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How do we have faith when the world is topsy-turvy?

When the candidates for the most powerful position in the world are seriously flawed and are perceived as making things worse instead of better?

When drugs and violence threaten our streets and our children?

There are no easy answers – no simple path

—because **the way to such faith is walking with Jesus**

- lifting up the poor and downtrodden,
- healing the sick and the lame –even on the Sabbath!,

- feeding the hungry and
- challenging the greed of the rich and powerful,
- and advocating for the helpless.

The way to faith in a topsy-turvy world

is to walk with Jesus all the way through suffering and death and into resurrection.

That is the Christian life. That is what baptism is all about.

We get to be a part of the kingdom of God coming on earth as it is in heaven!

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But it doesn't come peacefully or without conflict.

It comes at the cost of a man on a cross.

When the world is swirling around us with bad news, we see Jesus in the midst of it all.

I have enjoyed seeing the immense statue of Jesus in Rio during the Olympics.

It is a reminder that our Lord is bigger than everything the world throws at us.

But I don't want to give the impression that walking with Jesus is a passive thing, just enduring until the end.

No – Jesus came to *change* a topsy-turvy world – to take it away from the corrupt earthly powers and bring it under his own dominion.

Jesus was counter-cultural where the culture opposed God.

He came to light a fire for powerful change.

And we who walk with Jesus are part of that fire and active in that change in our time.

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Speaking of fire –

Two Eskimos, sitting in a kayak, were very chilly. To keep warm, they lit a fire in the craft, but it sank. They should have known. You can't have your kayak and heat it too.

Give a man a fish, he eats for a day.

Teach a man to fish, he eats for a lifetime.

Give a man a fire, he's warm for a day.

Set a man on fire, he's warm for the rest of his life.

Jesus came to set us on fire for the kingdom of God.

It is no coincidence that the Holy Spirit arrived as tongues of fire.

Or that the apostles were filled with passion for the Good News of Jesus' death and resurrection to rescue people from the power of sin and death.

Or that this news separated families as people came to trust in Jesus, to stake their lives on him – even when it meant being burned at the stake.

Jesus had told them it would be so

– **sharing his life means a decision to leave other paths behind.**

For the 1st c. world, that meant leaving behind the religion of the Pharisees and Sadducees, and the Roman Imperial cult that worshiped Caesar as son of god.

For the 21st.c. world it means – as we do when we are baptized and confirmed – renouncing the devil and all his works and all his ways.

- Renouncing murder as a weapon of racism
- Renouncing the call to see some people as less than human and not worthy of respect
- Renouncing falsehood and deceit
- Renouncing hatred for other people
- Renouncing fear and violence

It means turning away from religions that trust karma or the universe or the stars for the future.

And it means turning toward Jesus

and choosing to live as people whose future is already secured by his death and resurrection.

To have faith in Jesus in a topsy-turvy world means to **refuse to let the present evil define us or the future.**

It means to see Jesus in the midst of all that is going on

– to see him as the Suffering Servant on the cross

and as the Victorious Lord enthroned over all.

Jesus has kindled a fire in us by filling us with the Holy Spirit.

Let us burn brightly in this world as those whose love for God and for others changes things. In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen