

Scripture: Matthew 7:24-27; James 2:14-18

Sermon Title: "Faith is a Verb Too!"

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In the strictest sense of the word, faith is a noun. Grammatically speaking, faith is a noun – it's a thing. Faith is something that one can possess. It's a strong belief or complete trust in something or someone. However, while the dictionary currently will contradict my next statement and yes basic tenants of the English language would disagree and English teachers among us will likely challenge me on this, I stand behind my next statement - faith is a verb too! I know, it may be hard to think of it like that! We tend to say someone has faith, we don't say someone faithed or that so-and-so is out there faithing. So it's hard to think of faith as a verb. Still, I have hope. More and more nouns in our world today are becoming verbs. The English language is constantly changing and in preparation for my sermon today, I was reading an article online from The Economist in 2010 called "You've been Verbed". In it, we are reminded of the many ways in which nouns have become verbs. For example, if you don't know the answer to something, many of us will suggest that we google it. Google, a noun that is a search engine online has become a verb. Or, if you are on Facebook, you may ask someone to friend you. Friend, once a noun is also a verb. In the same way, it's time to make faith a verb too! Why? Because faith should be an action, a continuum of actions in fact, that should be witnessed all throughout our living as we put the teaching of Jesus into our deeds. If faith is something that we merely possess, a thing that we have, and not something that we live, that we act upon, do we really have faith? This is the essential teaching found in the reading from the letter of James, where we hear that familiar quote that faith without works is dead. If faith is merely a noun that we possess and not a verb that we live, do we even have faith?

If it wasn't for, what I will call, a verb like faith, a faith that was not just heard about but acted upon, I probably wouldn't be standing here today serving the church or even being part of a church. Growing up, my family definitely considered ourselves

Christians but for a good chunk of time, we were not part of a faith community. For me, this was from the ages of 8 - 14, we were not involved in a church. Still we prayed before family meals, we observed Sunday as a day of rest, and I would sit with my grandmother from time-to-time as she would listen to some old gospel hymns. Then when I was 14, something happened. My father decided that my brother who was 15 at the time and I needed to be confirmed in the church - a moment in many churches when those who were baptized as infants or children get to learn about the Christian faith, take on the promises for themselves which their parents made at their baptism, and become a member of a congregation. So my dad learned that the church he grew up in, 5 minute drive from the farm, would be starting classes soon. And so this was where he decided we would go.

Now, notice that I say my dad decided this. I, on the other hand, was not happy about it. Perhaps we can chalk it up to a rebellious teenager moment, yet I didn't like being told what to do or, as I saw it, being told what to believe. In fact, I remember going to my mom and telling her how unfair this was that my dad was making such a decision on faith for me and my brother. I remember saying to her as boldly as I could, "if I want to be an atheist, that should be my choice!" Now, to be fair, at the time, I had no idea what I believed but I just wasn't happy with being told I needed to go to church. Still my mom, being the keeper of the peace, the centering and calming presence of the family, she encouraged me to go to the classes, learn about the Christian faith, and if I didn't want to be a part it after learning about it, at the end of the classes I could make that decision. She was always the voice of reason - still is! So I agreed to go.

For the next year, this class of 15 or so of us met every Sunday for an hour before worship to learn, discuss, and have fun. We learned some basics about the Bible. We talked about different tenants of the Christian faith. We discussed issues of faith in our world today. We also had a lot of fun, playing games, hanging out, it was a good group of kids! I found I really enjoyed being a part of the group. But it wasn't all the talking about faith that led me from that rebellious teenage moment to standing here. All the

talking about faith didn't convince me that I wanted to be a part of the church. The talking didn't persuade me to join the church after these classes had finished. Rather, it was the ways in which that community lived their faith - or to try and use it as a verb, it's the way that community faithed. I know it don't really roll off the tongue - we will work on it! They saw the call of faith to be one that would care for their neighbors, close by and far away. So mission trips to help rebuild after natural disasters was a big part of their lived faith. This community of believers saw the call to care for the faith community as important. I still remember when my mom was very ill and in the hospital for several months, the food that showed up. Churches are often the best at showing their love and care through casseroles and other goodies. In these ways and many more, they lived their faith. Did they always do it perfectly? No, none of us do. But their faith was alive with the works that spoke of a Christ who cared, a Jesus who loved, and a God who was active in our world. That's when I found my faith. That's when I knew I wanted to be a part of this thing called church. Because faith was not just something that was received and held onto like a trinket or a treasure, it was something that we did - it's something that we do.

As Jesus was finishing what we refer to as the Sermon on the Mount, where he spoke of faith, where taught of faith, where the crowd listened to his teachings, he ended with the words from Matthew which we also heard today. "Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock." When faith is not just something we have and it is something we do, we have a firm foundation on which to stand. When this is the way the church lives, the church will not fall. For faith spoken of and heard is merely half the call. When it is combined with a faith that we do, that we live, it's made strong.

Beloved People of God, you already know this because as a faith community you live it out already in beautiful ways. Caring for the community through Summerfest and support local programs through all that money raised. I mean do you realize how rare it is for a church's biggest fundraiser of the year to be one that not a single penny goes to

support the bottom line of the church budget. That's faith as a verb. Caring for one another, asking about each other, sending cards, checking in on the well-being of one another, the way you love each other is beautiful -that's faith as a verb. Being a place where our neighbors can turn to when they are in need, being a church of and for the community, and when through our Special Needs Fund we can offer a glimpse of help and hope in the challenging moments, that's faith as a verb. Being a place where we do our best to fully mean all are welcome. That's faith as a verb. As a community of faith, as a community of belief, and as a community of action, may we continue to hear and act upon the words of Jesus. May we always strive for that in our lives together, for such a way of living breathes life into this faith we profess. May our faith forever be alive as we transform this noun into a verb. So be it and may it be so. Amen.