

## THE TWELFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

August 19, 2007

### Psalm 33

- <sup>1</sup> Sing joyfully to the LORD, you righteous; it is fitting for the upright to praise him.
- <sup>2</sup> Praise the LORD with the harp; make music to him on the ten-stringed lyre.
- <sup>3</sup> Sing to him a new song; play skillfully, and shout for joy.
- <sup>4</sup> For the word of the LORD is right and true; he is faithful in all he does.
- <sup>5</sup> The LORD loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of his unfailing love.
- <sup>6</sup> By the word of the LORD were the heavens made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth.
- <sup>7</sup> He gathers the waters of the sea into jars; he puts the deep into storehouses.
- <sup>8</sup> Let all the earth fear the LORD; let all the people of the world revere him.
- <sup>9</sup> For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm.
- <sup>10</sup> The LORD foils the plans of the nations; he thwarts the purposes of the peoples.
- <sup>11</sup> But the plans of the LORD stand firm forever, the purposes of his heart through all generations.
- <sup>12</sup> Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD, the people he chose for his inheritance.
- <sup>13</sup> From heaven the LORD looks down and sees all mankind;
- <sup>14</sup> from his dwelling place he watches all who live on earth --
- <sup>15</sup> he who forms the hearts of all, who considers everything they do.
- <sup>16</sup> No king is saved by the size of his army; no warrior escapes by his great strength.
- <sup>17</sup> A horse is a vain hope for deliverance; despite all its great strength it cannot save.
- <sup>18</sup> But the eyes of the LORD are on those who fear him, on those whose hope is in his unfailing love,
- <sup>19</sup> to deliver them from death and keep them alive in famine.
- <sup>20</sup> We wait in hope for the LORD; he is our help and our shield.
- <sup>21</sup> In him our hearts rejoice, for we trust in his holy name.
- <sup>22</sup> May your unfailing love rest upon us, O LORD, even as we put our hope in you. (NIV)

**Genesis 15:1-6** <sup>1</sup> After this, the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward."

<sup>2</sup> But Abram said, "O Sovereign LORD, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?"

<sup>3</sup> And Abram said, "You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir."

<sup>4</sup> Then the word of the LORD came to him: "This man will not be your heir, but a son coming from your own body will be your heir."

<sup>5</sup> He took him outside and said, "Look up at the heavens and count the stars -- if indeed you can count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be."

<sup>6</sup> Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness. (NIV)

### **Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16**

<sup>1</sup> Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.

<sup>2</sup> This is what the ancients were commended for.

<sup>3</sup> By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.

<sup>4</sup> By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was commended as a righteous man, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith he still speaks, even though he is dead.

<sup>5</sup> By faith Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death; he could not be found, because God had taken him away. For before he was taken, he was commended as one who pleased God.

<sup>6</sup> And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

<sup>7</sup> By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. By his faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.)

<sup>8</sup> By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going.

<sup>9</sup> By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise.

<sup>10</sup> For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

<sup>11</sup> By faith Abraham, even though he was past age -- and Sarah herself was barren -- was enabled to become a father because he considered himself faithful who had made the promise.

<sup>12</sup> And so from this one man, and he as good as dead, came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore.

<sup>13</sup> All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth.

<sup>14</sup> People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own.

<sup>15</sup> If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return.

<sup>16</sup> Instead, they were longing for a better country -- a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them. (NIV)

**Luke 12:32-40** <sup>32</sup> "Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom.

<sup>33</sup> Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys.

<sup>34</sup> For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

<sup>35</sup> "Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning,

<sup>36</sup> like men waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks they can immediately open the door for him.

<sup>37</sup> It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. I tell you the truth, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them.

<sup>38</sup> It will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready, even if he comes in the second or third watch of the night.

<sup>39</sup> But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into.

<sup>40</sup> You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him." (NIV)

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INTRO - In 1997 St. John members Archie and Lillian Stamm attended a voters' meeting on Sunday. Then on Monday they visited the office of their lawyer and friend, then they stopped by the church. Finally, they went to the grocery store. Archie was not feeling well, so he stayed in the car while Lillian went into the store. When Lillian got back Archie had started to lapse into a coma from a stroke. Archie died the next day.

Do you know or remember what happened to Lillian? She became very ill, and ended up in the hospital. During Archie's funeral she could not attend because she was so ill. They say that stress and loss can show in physical ailments, and I believe it did in Lillian. She was diagnosed with 7 ailments, and for the next year her health was in horrible shape. But in spite of losing her spouse of over 50 years, she kept telling others about Jesus, especially the woman caring for her, Heidi Angle. Before long Heidi's grandbaby was baptized. Then Heidi's own adopted baby was baptized. Finally, as this ill elderly lady shared her Lord Jesus, Heidi joined St. John, though taking care of ill people she could seldom get to worship herself..

Lillian Stamm suffered loss and was near death, but she kept on sharing Jesus. In the midst of loss, and illness, and trials, she kept going as a Christian for one reason. While Lillian did not know what God had in store for her, she believed in God. She believed that God had created her, and saved her in Jesus. She believed that God was with her, and had a purpose for her life. Lillian's faith was the core of her life. Lillian did not know what God had in mind after the death of her husband, and after her own illness, but she trusted that God could still use her, so she kept going.

Our verse from Hebrews for today tells us, **<sup>1</sup>Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. <sup>2</sup>THIS IS WHAT THE ANCIENTS WERE COMMENDED FOR.** Lillian is one of our ancients, whose faith, whose trust in God when she did not know what was going on, blessed many of us. Lillian was and is a lady of faith.

God calls us to faith in our epistle lesson for today. We are told, **<sup>1</sup>Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.** Even when we cannot see, we can believe and hope that God will act in love and power, as he acted in Jesus' dying and rising to save us. People who have faith keep going through the blessings and challenges of life, not because they are strong, but because they trust God.

Look at the example of today's lesson. Abraham left home. He didn't know what was in store for him, but he trusted God and traveled to a land he did not know. Abraham was childless at a very elderly age. He trusted that God would work, and God sent a son, Isaac, through his wife, Rebekkah. Abraham trusted God would work even in his trials, and work God did, in amazing ways. Through faith God did things in Abraham's life Abraham could not have done himself.

Do you have problems, losses, questions? It is difficult for you to understand what God has in mind for you and for your life? Are you unsure where you are headed in life? Let me tell you something. God loves you. You are his child through creation, and you are his child through Jesus' sacrificial dying on the cross and victorious rising from the dead. You may not know what God has in mind for you, but when you trust Him he will work in your life. He can and will do amazing things you could never do yourself.

Sometimes people believe that faith is a feeling of strength, a feeling of peace, something I work in myself. Faith is not a feeling we have. Really, as our lesson says, when we cannot see, when we don't know what God is doing with our life, but then we still look to God and trust God, that is faith.

About 8 or 9 years later, after Lillian had recovered, been to church, moved into the Pioneer home and back into Heidi's place, nine years later just after Christmas Lillian actually was dying. I visited her in the hospital a day or two before she died, and my son Tim was with me. You know what she did? Lillian had been short of breath, but she gathered her strength and talked to my son for about 10 minutes. She told him, in no uncertain terms to make sure to keep up his faith in Jesus. She took some of the precious last ounces of energy she had, and spent it on telling someone she cared for about the love of Jesus. Lillian wasn't sure what God was doing, but she knew that God would act, and she continued to trust God and His love in Jesus.

Today God acts in a way we can't really see. In the bread and wine we receive the body and blood of Jesus. God forgives us through real faith, and gives us a home that is in heaven.

Are you going through difficulties? Do you have trouble right now seeing what God has in mind. I pray that in your cloudy, dreary days, that you may be **sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see**, because you Trust God. You will be surprised and blessed.