

If You've Got It Ephesians 2:4-10 (English Standard Version)
Saint Marks United Methodist Church, Charleston, WV **4th Sunday of Lent (March 18) 2012**

⁴ ... God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ— by grace you have been saved— ⁶ and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷ so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. ⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

I'd like you to join in singing a song, that I hope many, if not all, of you know. The choir will sing the first verse, to refresh your memory, and then I'd ask you to join in with verses 2-4.

[sing "If You're Happy and You Know It"]

I couldn't help myself, as I danced with today's epistle lesson over the past two weeks. This song just would not leave my mind.

Today's scripture lesson contains what Dr. Albert Outler (the greatest John Wesley scholar of at least the 20th century) said was Wesley's favorite scripture in all the Bible: Ephesians 2:8-9.

. ⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

This is (a bit surprisingly) a fairly radical message – particularly in many churches.

How many of you have grown up – or attended churches – hearing the message: FAITH: IT'S WHAT YOU NEED TO BE SAVED. YOU'D BETTER GET IT. YOU CAN'T EARN SALVATION IT HAS TO COME BY FAITH. YOU'D BETTER GET IT, IF YOU WANT TO BE SAVED. And then there are several ways you are told about what you need to do to get and increase your faith, as though faith were some sort of religious muscle that you need to make sure you exercise enough to keep it strong.

Nope.

It's a gift. You either have it or you don't.

Oh, for sure, it may grow and it may even waiver at times. But faith is a gift that you can't go out and get. You have to receive it as a gift.

It is given. You must receive. But it's a gift. Period.

If you've got it – it shows.

Hence the song:

If you've got faith & you know it, clap your hands.

If you've got faith & you know it, tap your toes.

If you've got faith & you know it, then your life will surely show it.

If you've got faith & you know it, nod your head.

If we've got it, then it shows.

You know, when I was an on call chaplain at Saint Mary's Hospital, one of the things I was called out for was to be with a family when someone was dying – if they wanted a chaplain.

It was an amazing thing to go into someone's room, when someone was dying – people that I'd never met before. And within less than 90 seconds I could tell if this was a room of people of faith or not. I can't describe it to you now. I could just tell.

When they had it, it showed.

And, it's not just when someone is dying. It's all the time. You can't have a living, breathing, vibrant faith, and keep it a secret. Just doesn't happen.

Do you know anyone who gets a brand new car, and then does not drive it, but lets it sit & rust? No, that's crazy. Of course not. Same with living, breathing saving faith. If you've got it, then it shows.

People with faith show it. People with faith live it. And people who live their faith, get stronger in their faith.

Christie went into the hospital this past week to have a baby – it was her third child. Her parents were there with her. Six year old sister of the almost newborn was close at hand -- excited to meet her new brother. Suddenly something began to happen,

unlike with the previous two deliveries. Christie's parents could tell something was wrong. Then the nurse sent the nurse-in-training to fetch the doctor STAT! Parents heard that their pregnant daughter's blood pressure dropped to 40 Over 30. As the parents were hurriedly ushered out of the room, they heard the nurse say, "We're losing her." Dad heard it not just once, but twice that morning.

After a very traumatic time and a miraculous rescue, Christie and baby came out just fine. Christie told her parents, afterwards: "You know, I've been trusting God for so long, when I heard them saying that they thought I might be dying, it was so very, very strange. I knew what they were saying, but I also knew that however it came out, I was OK. I just trusted.

Christie had the gift of faith. And she had trusted God for a very long, long time. So when she really needed to rely on that faith, it was there – strong and sure.

When we've got it, we know, and we get accustomed to trusting God, so that when we really need that faith, we can depend on our experience.

Louise realized how blessed she was, so she was always looking for the surprise blessing God inserted into each day and she was never disappointed. She had the gift of faith

Experience is the best teacher.

Our Communion liturgy has a prayer that asks: " Free us for joyful obedience ." Joyful obedience frees us for trusting expectancy .

Susie [a composite of real people we knows] never trusted God enough to tithe , and then when she got sick/cancer/fired/divorced/abused/mistreated , she didn't have enough experience in trusting God to have any confidence in God now. When asked if she had faith, Susie said, "I thought I did. But it let me down when I needed it."

Now, I know that some people think that I just took a good important tenant of our religion – FAITH – and turned it into something quite uncomfortable – MONEY, TITHING.

Sorry.

But, Jesus talked more about money than He did about prayer or salvation. Money. Kingdom of Heaven. Those were two of his favorite topics.

But, let's also be very, very clear about this. This sermon is NOT about what you need to do to get saved. YOU'VE GOT IT or YOU DON'T. It's a gift. You've either received it or not.

You are not going to increase your chances of going to heaven one iota by the amount of money you give to the church.

However, whether or not you trust God, and know the Kingdom of Heaven, WILL have a lot to do with how much money you give to the church.

So let me be very, very clear about this. **Talk about money**, about our gifts to the church **is a talk about FAITH.**

IF YOU'VE GOT IT, IT SHOWS.

And when you rely upon it, and build a strong trust base, then it won't let you down.

When I got my motor scooter last year, I had to take a driving test for the motorcycle lesson. There were several parts of that test that I could not pass. Driving a car for all those years did not help me feel comfortable enough to lean into a tight turn and then give it gas in the very tightest part of the turn, to keep the bike from falling over.

It was only doing it over and over and over again in the parking lot out back of the church – in between the lines, that I gained my confidence, that I knew that I could do it.

Experience is the best teacher.

God gave me a very basic sense of balance –it's a gift, I can't boast. All I've done is received that gift and – with experience – learned to trust in my ability to do this counterintuitive kind of thing required for tight motorcycle turns.

God gave me a very basic faith – it's a gift, I can't boast. All I've done is receive the gift, and – with experience -- learned to trust in it.

We can't fake it. Some people try, and then they get so disappointed when life gives them a situation where they need their faith and they realize it's simply untested fakery. And it lets them down.

IF YOU'VE GOT IT, THEN IT SHOWS.

That plain. That simple.

If you don't have it, don't panic. I believe God gives it to everyone eventually – if they choose to receive it.

IF YOU'VE GOT IT, then you know what I'm talking about.

In a few moments, I'm going to invite you to come forward to pick up your pledge card.

There are some of you who will pick it up, fill it out, and **do your duty**, to support your church. **Thank you.**

There are others of you who will pick up your pledge card, and show your trust. **Nobody** (except the bookkeeper – not me, nor Janet, nor chair of the stewardship committee – just the bookkeeper, who provides you your tax receipt at the end of the year) **will know what it is.**

But you'll show your trust to yourself. Because you know that you will be giving **as an act of faith which is a gift to you.**

And, **IF YOU'VE GOT IT, THEN IT SHOWS.**

If you've not got it – you are certainly invited to help your church. That's a nice thing to do. Thank you. But, probably – particularly if you keep your mind and heart open – the gift of faith will come to you bye and bye. **When it does – you'll know it – and it will show.**

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.