

### **September 13, 2020 Outdoor Worship Pastor Carolyn Staats**

Our theme for worship tonight is faith. And faith, at its core, is a relationship. This relationship is founded on trust, on hope, and on love. Our God who created all things is steadfast in all three of these things - God is absolutely worthy of our trust, provides us with hope, and loves us in and through all things.

Relationships are a two-way street. In any relationship we have, we have to put forth some effort in order to keep it healthy and strong. Especially living in this part of the world, we are not strangers to the effort needed to keep up the roads. As the joke goes, the two seasons of the upper Midwest are winter and construction, am I right?

But what makes the relationship of faith that we have with God so powerful and so unique is that nothing we ever do on our side of the street will ever stop God from loving us, from showing up for us, and from working fervently in our world. We learn about God showing up for people in the hardest and most impossible situations throughout the scriptures, including some we heard about today. God heard the cries of the people Israel when they were enslaved and guided them into the promised land and freedom. God heard the fears of Abraham and blessed him with thousands of generations of descendants into the future. God heard the needs of the human people and gave us his Son Jesus Christ as our Savior, who defeated the power of sin and death and gives us the promise of new and everlasting life. God hears the desires of our hearts, our minds, our spirits, and joins us in the midst of every joy, every sorrow, and everywhere in between.

So what do we need from our side of the street to strengthen our relationship with God? This is where faith comes in. Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. Faith is what keeps us coming back to the goodness and love of God, even when it's hard and seems impossible that God could still be at work with and for us. Faith is what strengthens us, when we are reminded of God as our rock and our refuge. Faith is gained through the power of new life in Jesus' resurrection, and sustained through our prayer, our worship, our service to one another, our study of God's Word, and all our spiritual practices that keep us intentionally connected to God at the core of our being.

Good things come from our relationship with God, from keeping our faith strong and healthy. We gain a deeper sense of God's presence in our world, and within ourselves, when we keep our faith in focus. We find what we seek - just as Thomas sought the reality of Jesus' resurrection, Jesus delivers the reality of God's promises of new life for us, every single day. We are comforted and gain a sense of peace when we give our struggles and pains up to God. We find a path laid before us when we lean into God's call for us - to worship and love God and love our neighbors in all we do. Those great commandments above all things provide us with the signposts we need to guide us throughout our journey in life. Even when things seem impossible, even when things are difficult and out of our control and we don't know where to turn or what else to do or try, our faith will keep us strong. Our faith in the God of all time and place provides us with a foundation of strength and love, even when we can't muster up that strength and love ourselves. God is overflowing and abundant in God's love for us, He is our strength, our refuge, and our hope.

When we pour out our hearts out to God and trust in the work of God in our world, when we surrender to God's call to love him and one another in all we do, things get better. Prayer clears our

heads and allows us to cast our burdens at Jesus' feet, lightening our hearts and minds. Worship reminds us to praise God and be in awe of all that God has created. Even just breathing deeply in the midst of God's creation reminds us that the Holy Spirit moves within and around us and is our Advocate who comes alongside us in all times and places. All of these practices are ways that we can show up in our relationship with God and strengthen our faith. For the constant assurance of God's love, for the path of life and love Jesus laid for us, and for the workings of the Holy Spirit that connect us to God and the whole communion of saints, we give unending thanks and praise. Amen.