



ABOUT THE PROPERs

An Explanation of the Variable Parts of the Divine Service



Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost

August 23, 2020



The Christian answers doubt with faith

Doubt is the unfortunate companion of faith. Wherever faith clings to the promises of God, doubt is always right there lingering in the back of our mind, constantly asking the serpent's Garden question, "Did God really say?" How striking to think that we must have faith in God before we can doubt him! Today's lessons show us believers who had faith in God and his abilities to save them, but yet doubted when his plans or purpose failed to match theirs. In each case, it is adversity that fights against faith and allows its unfortunate companion to rear its ugly head. And in each case, the true answer to doubt is not found in the great miracle that removes adversity, but in the still small voice of our Savior God whispering in his Word. Today we hear our Savior God ask us, "Why did you doubt?", and we see that the Christian answers doubt with faith. ¹

The Propers

The Propers are those portions of the service that change (or, are "proper" to) each Sunday or season of the church year. The Propers differ from the Ordinary (from the Latin ordo, which means "regular order") portions of the liturgy, which do not change (e.g. the Lord's Prayer). The Propers offer the variety to the worship service and emphasize particular worship themes throughout the liturgical calendar.

First Lesson ¹ 1 Kings 19:9-18

Elijah's great victory of faith was followed closely by great adversity. From the heights of Mt. Carmel, Elijah fell into the depths of frustration. Even after such a great display of God's glory, this evil queen issued her death threats. Even after such a powerful display of God's might, a general spiritual renewal did not occur. Elijah had faith in God's power, but he doubted when God's plans and purpose did not match his own. Hadn't the people broken the covenant? Why didn't God come and make things right with earthquake, wind, and the fire of judgment? Elijah went to the site where the covenant had been made, to the mountain of God where God had come once before in fire and wind and earthquake. There Elijah brought his case against the people of Israel. God answered his prophet not with great acts of power, but rather with quiet words of promise. God displayed all of his power, so that his display of grace might be all the more astounding. He would not come in judgment, but in grace for his elect. The still small voice of his message would accomplish all that he desired. It would tear down kingdoms and establish dynasties. It would bring judgment on his enemies and reserve a people for himself. Elijah heard the Word of God and had to wonder, "Why did I doubt?"

Second Lesson ¹ Romans 9:1-5

Paul explains the roots of the Christian Church. He speaks of his brothers, the children of Israel, and asks them, "Why did you doubt? Why did you doubt that salvation is by grace, not by works? Why did you doubt the Messiah long promised was fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth?" The unbroken line of God's acts of grace left Israel no reason to doubt. Yet they did. And God's answer to that doubt? He chose a remnant by grace and spoke to them in the gentle whisper of God made man.

Gospel of the Day ¹ Matthew 14:22-33

Doubt and faith rose and fell like the waves of the sea that dark night. The evangelist paints a picture of frantic effort against a storm with little progress. Then Jesus came—and note the way he came! He did not simply appear among them, as he could have. He did not fly or float. He walked on the water. The very thing they had been fighting, the water that threatened to take their life, Jesus walked on it like it was dry ground. What a Savior we have that walks on the waters of all our greatest fears! See the faith in the disciples grow! See Peter show it in his own miraculous walk. But, all too often, doubt is the unfortunate companion of faith. Though Jesus was standing on

the water, Peter feared it. What pulls our eyes of faith away from Jesus? What are the waves and wind in our lives that make us doubt him? To Peter, Jesus asked, “Why did you doubt?” He gave no answer. What could he say? With Jesus there is never any need to doubt. How sad that we so often do! Rather, let us focus on the Savior and watch our faith swell as the disciples’ did when their doubts vanished, and they gave the greatest evidence of faith: they worshipped that man from Nazareth for what he truly was, the Son of God.

Psalm of the Day Psalm 73

God is our stronghold and sure defense who will take us to eternal life when our life on this earth comes to an end.

Verse of the Day Hebrews 11:1

“Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.” One of the most memorable chapters in Scripture, Hebrews 11 lists more than a dozen Old Testament examples of those who held to the one, true faith. The common thread: these people couldn’t see the fulfillment of the promises, like we can, but they still took God at his word in the certainty of saving faith.

Prayer of the Day

Almighty and everlasting God, you are always more ready to hear than we to pray, and to give more than we either desire or deserve. Pour upon us the abundance of your mercy, forgiving us those things of which our conscience is afraid, and giving us those good things for which we are not worthy to ask, except through the merits and mediation of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Hymn of the Day 384 “By Grace I’m Saved” (Christian L. Scheidt, 1709-1761)

Church Year Season ¹ Sundays after Pentecost

After reliving the great events of the life of Christ, the worshipping Church spends half a year focusing on the teachings of Christ. The Church wears green during the season of Pentecost as the Spirit uses those teachings of Jesus to grow the faith of believers. The appointed lessons teach us the characteristics of the Holy Ministry, the Christian, the Church, our God, and the Christian life.

Colors & Symbolism Sundays after Pentecost: Green

Green is the color of life, refreshment, growth, and regeneration. Whereas the first half of the Church Year (the “Festival Half” or the “Half Year of Our Lord”) focused on the life of Christ during his earthly ministry, the emphasis for the second half (the “Non-Festival half” or the “Half Year of the Church”) shifts to the result of Christ’s work through the Word: the work of defining and creating faith, and inspiring its fruits. The theme of the Christian’s growth in faith (like healthy green plants) fills the season.

Nain Paraments Sundays after Pentecost

Superfrontal: When Isaiah was called to be a prophet of the LORD, two seraphs (a class of angels) appeared and called out to one another, “Holy, Holy, Holy” (Isaiah 6:3). The threefold repetition of the divine adjective emphasizes the infinite holiness of the Triune God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Some congregations count the Sundays in this season of the Church Year as the Sundays after the festival of the Holy Trinity, calling it the “Trinity season,” or the “Sundays after Trinity.” That is why most paraments for this season feature symbols of the Holy Trinity.

Lectern antependium: The equilateral triangle is one of the oldest emblems of the Holy Trinity. The three equal sides and angles represent the equality, unity, and co-eternal nature of the three persons of the Trinity. Though they are three distinct persons, they are of one essence as one God (Deuteronomy 6:4). The three interwoven circles represent the three members of the Trinity and emphasize their unity and eternal nature; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are without beginning or end.

Pulpit antependium: At each point of the triangle (the significance of the triangle is explained above) is a nimbus, Latin for *cloud*. The nimbus appears as a circle, or a halo. In Christian artwork, nimbi surround the head of the Father (when he is depicted as a human), Jesus Christ, or the Holy Spirit (when he is depicted as a dove) to signify their glory and holiness. In artistic depictions of believers (saints), nimbi are placed around their heads to show that they have been made holy by God’s grace in Christ and through faith. The three fish in between the nimbi and that meet in the middle of the triangle signify Christians who are united to the Triune God by faith. Fish have come to represent the followers of Jesus because believers have been brought into the ship of God’s church through the efforts of those who proclaim Gospel (cf. “fishers of men” in Matthew 4:19).

¹ Courtesy of “Planning Christian Worship: Year A”. Jonathan E. Schroeder, Author and Editor.
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