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SERMON TITLE: How to Have Faith
SCRIPTURE: Mark 8:11-21
DATE: January 16, 2022

Online service at www.fpcd.org/live-stream

Read also Psalm 147:1-12. Check out the service at www.fpcd.org.

What does it mean to you to have faith? Does it mean you demand conformity to certain rules? Many things require rules.

Example One: the lottery

- What if the administrator was allowed to pick their own ticket?

That would not be right! Fair rules are important.

Example Two: gaining a diploma

- Academic awards mean requirements have been met. What if failing students get the same degree as those who learned the material?

It wouldn't be equitable! Achievement matters.

Example Three: marriage

- What if you got married but never lived together?
- What if you got married and kept dating others?

It wouldn't work. Marriage by its essence means you covenant to be faithful to your spouse!

How do faith and rules work together? Rules mean you have proof or predictability. What does having faith mean to you? Do you live by the rules first or faith first?

Today is the second Sunday after Epiphany. Epiphany is the celebration of the wise men's visit to Jesus. This visit from Gentile leaders "manifested" the incarnation, "God with us."

Epiphany means "manifestation" in Greek.

These kings of Gentile nations followed a star to Bethlehem where they worshipped Christ and gave him gifts. Tradition places this as happening on January 6. Twelve days after Christmas.

An epiphany is a "sign" or a "reveal." It's like a reveal party for someone who is expecting a baby.

Jesus Christ was "revealed" as God's epiphany by the Gentile kings' visit. Think about when Jesus rode into Jerusalem

on Palm Sunday to celebrate the Passover. Again, Gentiles visited Him:

"Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. They came to Philip . . . and said to him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." (Jn 12:20-21).

After his birth and right before the crucifixion, Greeks came and "revealed" God's Messiah. This reminds us of God's work to save the world—people of all nations.

An epiphany is a manifestation outside the box. It is a "reveal." So why did Jesus discourage signs as to his identity? Let's hear the story. READ Mark 8:11-12

When the Pharisees heard that Jesus had arrived, they came and started to argue with him. Testing him, they demanded that he show them a miraculous sign from heaven to prove his authority. When he heard this, he sighed deeply in his spirit and said, "Why do these people keep demanding a miraculous sign? I tell you the truth, I will not give this generation any such sign."

So in spite of all the manifestations of power, the healings, opening of blind eyes and deaf ears, and Jesus just feeding two massive crowds of thousands of people, they want proof of authority within the confines of religious rules or expectations. Hmm. Jesus did not give them the courtesy of even explaining this.

Mark continues with what happened next (Mk 8:13-21). . .

So he got back into the boat and left them, and he crossed to the other side of the lake. But the disciples had forgotten to bring any food. They had only one loaf of bread with them in the boat. As they were crossing the lake, Jesus warned them, "Watch out! Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and of Herod." At this they began to argue with each other because they hadn't brought any bread. Jesus knew what they were saying, so he said, "Why are you arguing about having no bread? Don't you know or understand even yet? Are your hearts too hard to take it in? 'You have eyes-- can't you see? You have ears-- can't you hear?' Don't you remember anything at all? When I fed the 5,000 with five loaves of bread, how many baskets of leftovers did you pick up afterward?" "Twelve," they said. "And when I fed the 4,000 with seven loaves, how many large baskets of leftovers did you pick up?" "Seven," they said. "Don't you understand yet?" he asked them.

Living within religious rules means you don't see the epiphany. The disciples obviously missed it, too! What was Jesus expecting them to see? What does it mean to have faith? Is it expecting God to prove himself again and again?

Jesus was not interested in that. Jesus explains why. Did you catch it? His explanation helps us know how to have faith.

They could not see the signs that were right in front of them!

What does it mean to have faith? Is it keeping religion in a box of prescribed rules? Or is it the attitude like that of the child who received a pile of manure in his Christmas stocking and looked up and said with joy—I KNOW there's a pony in here somewhere!

The Pharisees watched the miraculous feeding and instead of exclaiming with joy, "God is certainly with us!" they retorted: "Prove yourself. Then we will have faith in you."

No wonder Jesus said, "You have eyes--can't you see?"

Here's an example of faith. The wise men noticed an unusual star. Perhaps they knew of King David's Psalm: "God counts the stars and calls them all by name" (Ps 147:4). So they sought him in faith to pay him homage. "We trust God is doing something here!"

Do you have eyes to see the things God does for our world? God does this, and more . . .

- heals brokenhearted people (Ps 147:3)
- supports the humble (v. 6)
- provides rain for the earth (v. 8)
- gives food to the wild animals (v. 9)

But God does not "take pleasure in human might." That means God does not respect those who rely on their own judgment first. Do you know what God values? God values those who fear (respect) him and put their hope in his unfailing love.

Let's go back to the passage. Here's what it said: *They demanded that he show them a miraculous sign from heaven to prove his authority.*

That's not faith.

What did the wise men do? They acted when they saw something unusual and they were rewarded as the first nations to embrace and pay homage to God's King.

Note that when they saw the sign of the star, they acted in faith first – then they saw and worshipped Jesus (the epiphany or sign).

The Pharisees did the opposite. They were all about the status quo that they could control:

"We know that God counts the stars and calls each by name, provides rain and gives food, but he needs to pass a test and show us a sign FIRST. Then we will follow him."

Do you act in faith first? Or do you stick with the rules?

Even the disciples had seen an amazing epiphany because Jesus had just fed 4,000 people with a couple of sandwiches. But they are worried that Jesus is mad because they forgot to bring bread in the boat.

When you don't act in faith but demand proof from God, it's an insult to God.

This is a risky message! Faith is much riskier than following the rules, especially during difficult circumstances. You might say to yourself, "Where is this going? I'm better off to stay home." Faith is truly like being on a boat surrounded by moving waters.

So I want to give you a comparison, and then you decide: faith first or proof first?

FAITH FIRST develops

Dependency
Confidence
Commitment
Trust in God
Covenant relationship
Comfort
Respect for God
Courage

PROOF FIRST develops

Bondage to rules
Doubt
Reliance on limited human judgment
Finite vision
Elevation of self-effort
Worldly wisdom
Anxiety
Fear

Faith First builds experience with God keeping God's promises; God acting at just the right time; and God bringing joy and laughter out of sorrow and pain, when you trust him.

Faith First means you open yourself to the option that God blesses exponentially.

Having faith: it is the call of those who follow Jesus. Let us not miss the signs because we have the "yeast of the Pharisees." Instead, let us have the joy, the excitement of living "Faith First."

AMEN