

6TH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

JUNE 30, 2013

FAITHFULNESS IS A RESPONSE

Pastor Jim Dunn

Galatians 5:22

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

Somewhere over Missouri, a passenger plane was heading toward a sudden thunderstorm. The flight attendant announced over the intercom that all passengers were to take their seats. It was a fairly rowdy bunch of passengers. I think there must have been some Cardinals fans or Pirates fans flying home from Kansas City.

Well, they weren't being too quick to respond to the flight attendant's instruction. So, she repeated the announcement. "The flight is about to get bumpy. For your own safety, take your seats." Most did. But a few didn't, so she changed her tone. "Ladies and gentlemen, for your own good, take your seats." Apparently, still not everyone was paying attention, because then a different voice came on the intercom. "This is Captain Brown. People have been known to get hurt by going to the bathroom instead of staying in their seats. Let's be very clear about our responsibilities. My job is to get you through this storm up ahead. Your job is to do what I say. Now sit down and buckle up."

Those passengers couldn't see the pilot. But he had told them who he was. They couldn't see their pilot. But they could hear what he was saying to them. So, now the question was, Would they believe who he was? Would they believe what he said and respond accordingly?

A response is faithfulness. Faithfulness, the seventh fruit of the Spirit, is a response. Faithfulness believes *who* God is. Faithfulness believes *what* God says.

Faithfulness, as a fruit of the Spirit, is distinct from faith. Faith is believing *in* the Triune God for our salvation. Faithfulness is believing what God says in the day-to-day challenges, at home, in the workplace, in time of crisis, in time of sorrow, and in time of happiness. Faithfulness is submitting to His Word and will. Luke provides a picture of this fruit of the Spirit. He recounts a storm he was in with Paul. Paul was being taken to Rome to face trial before Caesar, along with some other prisoners. Luke was with him as a companion. They were on board a ship near the island of Crete. Then, in Luke's own words, "a wind of hurricane force, called a 'northeaster,' swept down from the island. The ship was caught by the storm and could not head into the wind, so we gave way to it and were driven along." (Acts 27:14-15) They did not keep trying to resist the wind. They turned their sails *with* the wind. They gave way to it. They rode the wind wherever it would take them. That is a picture of faithfulness. Riding the wind of God's will, submitting to it instead of resisting it. Believing who He is. Believing what He says. Riding the wind of God's will and Word wherever they lead us, whether to calm or storm, whether to blessing or struggle. That is faithfulness.

Now, wouldn't you rather ride the wind than ride the roller coaster? Up one day and down the next? Faithful one day but not so faithful the next? Taking God at His Word one minute but ignoring it the next?

Rollercoaster faithfulness: responding not to who God *is* nor to what He says but to what we see God doing. Like those passengers on the stormy flight over Missouri, we cannot see our Pilot. But we do at times *look* for the proof that He is doing something about our storms. Do we see His blessing? Then faithfulness is up. And when we don't see God doing anything about our storms, when our finances suffer, when our congregation suffers, when we don't see God addressing the problems of our nation, when our health is not good, when we're out of work, when our relationships are struggling or we're lonely, when we don't see God answering our prayers, that's when we're likely to do as we will, instead of as He wills. It's also when we're most likely to defend our sinful actions. That's faithfulness down.

Luke provides us with a picture of rollercoaster faithfulness from that same stormy voyage. He quotes Paul talking to their shipmates: "Men, I can see that our voyage is going to be disastrous and bring great loss to ship and cargo and to our own lives, also." (Acts 27:10) Can you believe Paul actually said that? Those were not words of faith and encouragement. Because Paul was going by what we at times go by. Paul was going by what he could see God doing or not doing. That's faithfulness down. But look at one more picture of faithfulness that Luke provides from that same stormy voyage. "The ship struck a sandbar and ran aground. The bow stuck fast and would not move..." (Acts 27:41) I have paddled in an inner tube from the beach into water that would have been over my head to get out to a sandbar. I stood up on that sandbar. I can testify that a sandbar is solid and firm, enough to stop a small ship. A sandbar is a picture of God's faithfulness. It's firm and solid. Paul who knew about rollercoaster faithfulness once wrote, "If we are faithless, God will remain faithful." (2Timothy 2:13) God's faithfulness to us is as solid and firm as that sandbar on which Paul's ship ran aground out of the storm and into safety. God's faithfulness to us is as solid and firm as the nails in the wood when, with Jesus, our sins were nailed to the cross.

Paul could testify that God was faithful to him on that stormy voyage despite Paul's words that lacked faith and encouragement. Later on that same stormy voyage the Lord sent an angel to Paul to tell him: "*Do not be afraid*, Paul. You must stand trial before Caesar, and God has *graciously* given you the lives of all who sail with you." (Acts 27:24)

Do not be afraid. That's what God says. Graciously. That describes who God is. Do not be afraid. God's Word to us is in every storm. Gracious... describes the wind who pilots us through this life. "Gracious" describes His activity in our life whether we can see it or not. Our Pilot alone knows the storms that are ahead us and how to get us through them.

In their stormy voyage, Paul, Luke, and their shipmates rode the wind but did not reach their destination. Does that mean that by riding the wind they were on the wrong course? Does that mean they were wrong to ride the wind? When faithfulness to God leads us into storm and struggle, does that mean we're on the wrong course? No. God is faithful. That's who He is and that's what He promises. God is faithful. He does whatever it takes to bring us home, and that's more important than any other goal or destination we can think of. In that stormy flight over Missouri, after the pilot told the passengers to sit down and buckle up, the bathroom door opened, and a red-faced man with a sheepish grin walked out and took his seat. Was the pilot wrong in what he said? Was the pilot wrong for acting like a pilot? Was the pilot being insensitive or cruel to not let that man go to the bathroom?

No, just the opposite. He would rather the man be safe and embarrassed than uninformed and injured. Good pilots do what it takes to get their passengers home. So does God, through what He says and who He is.

AMEN