

Around the Synod

Lutherans and Faith

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Here's a simple test to determine if you're thinking about faith like a Lutheran: If you've got it all figured out, and are settled on all the answers, you're doing it wrong. If you doubt, struggle, question and inquire, you're on the right track.

One way Lutheran theology stands apart from other denominations is in its uncompromising commitment to the idea that faith is not our own. It is not intellectual achievement, mystical experience, or adherence to a check list of beliefs and dogmas. Faith is a gift, and what faith does is free us from concern for our own salvation that we might focus on our neighbor and their need instead. Faith is not a task to accomplish but a gift to embrace.

A few thoughts...

- *Faith is not about escaping punishment when we die.* This turns belief or faith itself into a work. This is the kind of thing Luther tried to correct rather than perpetuate. You aren't saved by having especially strong faith.
- *Faith is not a mystical experience of the divine.* Luther insisted God finds us, not so much in "mountain top" experiences but in our ordinary day to-day of life lived out in the warp and woof of everyday existence. We are wiser finding God there than when we're caught up to the seventh heaven.
- *Faith is not a constant sense of God's proximity.* Remember that many of the great saints of the church remarked how distant they felt from God, not how close. Feeling distant from God is not a mark of unbelief. Instead, it's an example of call, struggle, and prayer.
- *Faith is a turn to the neighbor.* I think often people assume that faith is supposed to turn us towards God. Quite the opposite, inasmuch as faith leads us to deep trust in God, the result is a turn towards the neighbor, setting us free to serve them in their every need.
- *Faith is struggle.* Faith is not relaxation, or ease, or inaction. True faith turns us so far towards the neighbor that we are dissatisfied with the current world as it is in its continuing separation from God. Faith bends us toward justice.