

## If We Are Faithless, He is Full-Time Faithful

18<sup>th</sup> Sun. after Pent. – 10/09/22 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: 2 Timothy 2:1-13 Pastor Keith Besel

v. 13, [Paul says of Christ Jesus,] “...if we are faithless, He remains faithful – for He cannot deny Himself.”

### Introduction

⊗ Once upon a time, in a small South Dakota town, a boy and girl were born. Rudy and Arlene were their names. They both grew up in that town, went to school in that town, fell in love and got married ... all in that same little town. And it wasn't long before Arlene found herself, as they used to say it, in a “family way”.

➔ As a Christian couple, they gave thanks to the Lord for the gift of the life she was carrying. Their baby, Caroline was born as a beautiful baby, but she was also a baby with spina bifida. The hospital staff placed her in an oxygen tent. And someone made the mistake of turning the oxygen up too high. By the time the error was discovered, Caroline was blind, deaf, and profoundly challenged.

⊗ Along with their deepest apologies, the doctors offered some suggestions. First, they said this young couple should go home and have another baby. Next, they said, “Since statistics dictated that Caroline would die before the age of six, they should put her into a state shelter”. Rudy and Arlene just didn't think they could take the child God had given them and turn her over to someone else. By their thinking, if Caroline really was going to die before the age of six, they would take care of her, love her, and be sure to tell her about Jesus.

➔ Now, understand what that decision meant. Caroline was never able to feed herself or control many of her bodily functions. She always ate baby food and needed to be fed and burped every four hours. Rudy and Arlene settled into a daily routine. Since they could not leave Caroline alone for any length of time, one of them went to early church, and the other went to late. When other children came into their marriage, the experts again told the couple to dissociate themselves from Caroline because the attention she demanded would “hurt” the other kids. A second time, the couple ignored the experts.

⊗ Now, before I go on with their story, I have to ask you all to consider, “What would you have done?” No question, Caroline put a strain on the family. As long as she was alive, there would be no family vacations; never a time when both mother and father could attend a school function or a children's Christmas service together. Still, these parents kept up the feedings and the diaper changings.

➔ Eventually, they found out Caroline was not deaf after all. Not only could she hear, as the years passed, they discovered that she could also speak. Granted, her vocabulary consisted only three words. *Daaaaah*, that was Daddy. When Rudy came home from delivering mail, she said it, *Daaaaah*. *Maaaaah* was Caroline's second word. Since Mom was always around, there was really no need for her to use that word as often. And what do you think the third word was that Caroline could say? It was *Jeeesis*. *Jeeesis* was always said with a smile. That's because during those feedings, both Rudy and Arlene sang to Caroline about Jesus and His love ... always about His love.

⊗ Caroline's six-year life span went by quickly. She lived to celebrate that birthday, and the seventh, eighth, and ninth! Nine years of early morning feedings and burpings and diaper changes. During those years, Arlene and Rudy took care of their girl. If they grew discouraged at her lack of progress, or tired from their endless work, they never said or showed it. It's just what they did. But what would you have done? Would you have watched over her during years ten and eleven? Would your commitment have lasted until her 20<sup>th</sup> birthday? For 27 years,

faithful *Maaaah* and *Daaaah* did just that. They faithfully took care of Caroline until *Jeeesis* took her home.

→ Yes, the lesson we learn from Caroline's earthly life of 27 years; after she had been confessing her faith in the most basic of ways – when Jesus took her home after all those years – is that only Jesus is Full-time Faithful.

## I. You and I have NOT been faithful.

✘ As I write these sermons, I do so each week with all of you in mind; often envisioning you in your lives with your various struggles and joys; at the same time that I look at my own life in the mirror. This week was no different. I'm sure most of us – if we found ourselves in a situation like Arlene and Rudy, would have worked tirelessly if we knew that our child might improve. And I'm equally sure many of us would have listened when the experts said, "There's no hope". I say many of us, because I'm sure some might have worked with Caroline for a few years ... maybe even a decade..., but 27 years? I don't know.

→ Of course, none of us can know for sure how we would respond until we find ourselves actually in that kind of situation. But that's really not the point of why I spent the time to share this story today. It's not for me to be able to stand up here and say, "You all should be faithful like Rudy and Arlene".

✘ All of us may be "faithful" in different ways; in the various situations that we find ourselves in life. But, let's be honest with ourselves, and most importantly with God – who is the only one that really knows each one of us at our core. Most of us are not "that faithful". We may be committed, but most are not that committed. We may be persistent, but who among us is that persistent?

→ In verses 12-13 of our text today Paul makes a distinction between two levels; two options, regarding the way that we live out our faith toward Jesus. He says, "If we deny [Jesus], He also will deny us". The Greek word for "deny" here is "arneomai" (ἀρνέομαι). It's the same word that Jesus used when He told Peter in Matthew 26:34, "...this very night, before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times". It is to "disown", "renounce" or "reject" a person – in this case, God. It is for a person to confirm his/her state of unbelief. To these people, Jesus says in Matthew 10:33, "whoever denies (ἀρνέομαι) Me before men, I also will deny (ἀρνέομαι) before My Father who is in heaven.

→ But denial of Jesus is quite different from the second option in verse 13 where Paul says, "...if we are faithless...". It's probably more accurate to say, "when we are faithless, He remains faithful...". The Greek word for "faithless" is "apisteo" (ἀπιστέω) and it means to be "disloyal", "distrustful", "less than full of faith". This is the same root word that is used in Mark 9:23-24 when the father brought his demon-possessed boy to Jesus and Jesus said, "All things are possible for one who believes.' Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, 'I believe; help my unbelief!(ἀπιστέω)". Friends, this describes every one of us as we desire to grow in our faith and commitment to Jesus, but face the reality that we all fall short in our sin.

✘ If we were to find ourselves in a situation like Rudy and Arlene, we *might* care for a child – maybe even for 27 years – but along the way we would all be selfish, self-serving, faithless in one way or another. They might not have showed it outwardly, but certainly Rudy and Arlene struggled with faithless thoughts and temptations too.

→ We try to do the right thing; to be *pretty* good people; to be faithful in this life, but we don't always succeed. The best we can ever be on our own is *pretty* good, never *totally* good people. And a person who isn't *totally* good is a person who is a *sinner*. Truth be told, none of us

sinners is as caring, concerned, considerate, compassionate, or as “faithful” as we’d like to think we are. And that’s true for all of humanity.

## II. Only Jesus has been faithful in Life & Death

✘ Oh...wait. That’s not quite right. History has seen one single, special, solitary exception to that rule, which is Jesus Christ, God’s Son; the world’s Savior. Verse 13 of our text reads, “If we are faithless, He remains faithful”. All of Scripture reveals to us just how exceptional Jesus is. The opening chapters of Genesis set the stage. God had created everything and declared it very good. “Very good” is the way God set things up, until Adam and Eve tarnished everything. In a self-centered act of defiance, they turned away from God’s will and fell prey to Satan’s sinful suggestions. Their disobedience brought death and darkness into the world, making certain that we could never again, by our own power, be reconciled with God.

➔ Instead of forever in a garden paradise, our sins guaranteed we were destined for hell. That’s the way it was, and that’s the way it would have remained if God hadn’t intervened and promised to send His Son as the substitute and Savior for all sinners. And the rest of the Old Testament tells how God, in spite of what His people did, remained faithful to His promise.

✘ When His people refused to enter the land He promised them, God remained faithful; waiting for the Holy Spirit to raise up a generation who would obey. When His people preferred to follow other gods, He faithfully brought them back. When they forgot the promise, God remained faithful; sending prophets to remind them of their uniqueness. No matter what His people did, God remained faithful; committed to sending the Savior who would bring forgiveness, reconciliation, and redemption.

➔ Then, when the fullness of time had come, God kept His promise to send His Son as Savior. It had been thousands of years since God first gave His promise on the day that Jesus left heaven and took up residence as flesh inside Mary’s womb. His homecoming was not what the “experts” of the world thought it should be. His first bed was an animal’s feeding trough, and the greeting committee was composed of a few ragged shepherds that had been recruited from the fields outside of town.

➔ That night was a foreshadowing of what was to come. The 27 years that our couple at the beginning of this message spent working with their daughter, pales in comparison to what Jesus endured as He, for 33 years, faithfully did everything necessary to save us. For every one of those 33 years Jesus was full-time faithful.

✘ Have you ever thought, I mean really thought, about what it means to be full-time faithful? If not, let’s take a quick look at the Gospels. Jesus entertained Magi from the Far East as a toddler. He grew up in Nazareth where He made friends, had neighbors, knew familiar faces. Yet when He returned as an adult and declared that His life’s mission was to win their forgiveness, those old acquaintances tried to throw Him off a cliff.

➔ What did it cost for Jesus to be full-time faithful and save you? Well, we all have a home, right? Having a home is not only a dream, but an expectation for most of us. Jesus gave up that dream. Most of you have a family who loves you. Jesus’ own mother and brothers considered Him to be “out of His mind”. How about a bank account? Maybe a little nest egg? During His temptations, Jesus was offered the riches of the world, yet He turned them down and lived in poverty so that you might be spiritually rich. Jesus’ friends included a tax collector of questionable honesty, a Samaritan woman of questionable morality, and a host of the sorrowful: the sick, the grieving, the friendless, the lost, and the leprous. Jesus listened to and gave Himself to them all – many times, as our Gospel Reading shows, without thanks.

- ✘ Jesus' own church leaders plotted His murder. His government knew He was innocent, yet declared Him guilty. And in spite of this, Jesus remained faithful in doing all that was needed to forgive your sins and save your soul. That means He remained silent when He was spit upon, when He was beaten, when He was whipped, and when a crown of thorns was forced onto His head. And even as He was nailed to a cross, He declared, "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Lk. 23:34). Page after page, chapter after chapter, verse after verse in the Gospels shows us that Jesus remained faithful. No matter what others did, Jesus was always full-time faithful; fulfilling His Father's promise to save sinners. Verse 13: "If..." – when "we are faithless, He remains faithful – for He cannot deny Himself". Jesus cannot turn away from, or reject, His very nature as the Son of God and Savior of the entire world.

### **III. Jesus is still faithful – Full-time**

- ✘ And His is a faithfulness that continues to this very day! Having fulfilled the Law, having resisted all temptations and defeated death itself, Paul tells us in verse 8 to "remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead". Yes, He is living and reigning right now from the Father's right hand as the fully-committed Savior; working in Word and Sacrament to keep His people in the faith.
  - ➔ He is there in the adoption service we call Holy Baptism; He's present to bless the vows of bride and groom; He sits beside every family that mourns and provides faith as we hear His Word and receive His body and blood.
  - ➔ He is here, dear Christian, right now, for you! Faithfully, He hears your prayers, understands the great concerns of your heart, and wishes to calm your fears. He is here now. He will be here, tomorrow and forevermore; loving you; forgiving you; and saving you.
- ✘ As Paul says, "The saying is trustworthy, for: If we have died with Him (as we have in our baptism), we will also live with Him; if we endure (in the faith), we will also reign with Him; if we deny Him, He also will deny us; if...", when "we are faithless, He remains faithful – for He cannot deny Himself" (vv. 11–13).
  - ➔ Our full-time faithful Savior, Jesus; fully deserving of our ongoing thanks and continued praise as faithless sinners, made to be His holy people by His grace. Amen.