



Hebrews 11:29—12:2; Psalm 82; Luke 12:49-56 Reverend Giuseppe Mattei (August 17, 2025)

Last week we named those who introduced us to the faith and modeled for us what it means to be faithful to God. They are our **mentors** in the faith who demonstrated with their life in big and small decisions what it means to love the Lord and follow God's directions. They trusted God even when no clear path was available. They trusted God's Word because they experienced God's faithfulness and presence all along: gracious oases of respite in deserts of hardship and despair became opportunities for God to refresh and nurture them for the journey ahead. They trusted God's promises and walked on; they endured even as the world despised them, ridiculed them and violently abused them.

This week, the letter to the Hebrews gives us more examples of people who trusted in the Lord especially when the going got tougher: through faith, seemingly **insurmountable obstacles are removed** (11:29, recalling the parting of the Red Sea found in Exodus 14), **obliterated** (11:30, recalling the crumbling of the walls of Jericho in Joshua 6), or **transformed** (11:31, recalling the conversion of Rahab the

prostitute at the time of the exploration of the Promised Land found in Joshua 2).

Whatever single or multiple grace experiences have started us on our personal journey of faith, we know **God has touched us and our life has never been the same**: we have surrendered to God who has first reached out to us and rescued us. We would be fools not embrace God gratefully and radically, listen faithfully to the Word, respect God's will conscientiously, honor God's statutes and commandments obediently, and practice the faith in humility.

At the outset of our faith journey, we may have questioned whether it was truly wise or reasonable to entrust ourselves to God, especially if doing so meant being misunderstood or even scorned by those around us. Often, this sparked a wave of inner debate and uncertainty, a weighing of risks and rewards. Would God's presence truly be sufficient to offset potential losses, such as strained relationships, diminished reputation, or even our own sense of belonging? Could we trust that God would safeguard us from adversity and persecution along the way?

But as we come to realize that God has already put in all God's chips through the life commitment of Jesus to us; that God has not held back; that we are showered by extravagant grace and receive all that we need, there is no turning back: we jump into God's merciful arms, trusting that God will

provide at the right time and exactly what we need, and will never abandon us.

Why trust God? What's the proposal, the **vision**?

God, *my* God, wants me to prosper, to enjoy abundance of life, to live free of fear and to experience peace. God wants me to reach my full potential, to express my creative spirit and to have love and joy in life. The more I get to know God the more I love God and learn to appreciate the things God loves. The more I spend time in the awareness of God the more I notice what does not align with the divine project and causes suffering and death in the world. And so, I also come to realize that **God's compassion extends to those around me and to the rest of creation.**

Salvation is not for an individual person alone but for the whole cosmos: it's the whole people that get saved. Would you say that includes believers as well as the unaware, the blind, the non-believers, the atheists and the criminals who are simply swept up by the goodness of Jesus and finally acknowledge him as Lord?¹ One may receive the call, but the purpose of the call is always universal, that is, for the benefit of the community. Abundant life is intended for all. Unity, Love, Joy and Peace are meant for all living beings.

¹ The word "Apiru," who associated with the Israelites in the desert, meant riffraff. See also Luke 23: 39-43; Matthew 13:47-48 and Matthew 5:45

Psalm 82 is a lament song: God addresses the supreme, heavenly court and what God has to say isn't pretty!

God is totally disgusted with what God sees: Dereliction of duty, indifference to human suffering, cruelty in fomenting fear and inflicting harm. Injustice and lack of care are moral realities the Creator of the Universe and Liberator of the afflicted will never tolerate.

The original question underlying all ethical questions remains: "**Where are you?**"² How do we live out our faith in God and in ourselves? How do we respond to the injustice and the suffering of the world?³ Can we ignore the maiming and killing of the many who live in war-torn countries; the desperate cry of immigrant children separated from their parents; the baseless incarceration of justice seeking non-violent protesters; the constant wondering of the homeless in search of affordable housing or a welcoming space; the plight of the wrongly accused and awaiting execution?

Once we are washed in the brilliant Light of God and have savored the soothing Joy of being loved and wanted by God, we understand viscerally the words of the prophet Micah:

“He has shown you, O mortal, what is good.
And what does the Lord require of you?

² Genesis 3:9

³ <https://give.elca.org/page/86777/action/2>

To act justly and to love mercy
and to walk humbly with your God.” (6:8)

The most basic Christian call is to caring for the vulnerable, loving of neighbors,⁴ and working for the good of the world.⁵

People who heed God's urging toward ethical greatness share God's passion for the good of the world. Their reward? They suffer with God when people thwart movement toward that good. **People who have been captivated by God share Jesus' passion for goodness and justice.** They suffer from the fact that their message will inevitably cause division. They know Jesus' anguish as they wait for God's reign of love to rule on Earth.

Jesus came to set Earth on fire with God's love, knowing that he would be burned in the process. The author of the Letter to the Hebrews pleads with us to "persevere in running the race," to "keep our eyes fixed on Jesus."

Faith in Jesus leaves no room for complacency in a world of injustice. The Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoevsky wrote that "love in action is a harsh and dreadful thing."⁶ Active love requires effort, commitment, and often suffering. Yet,

⁴ https://www.globalrefuge.org/news/ukrainians-in-limbo-deserve-stability/?utm_source=LIRS+Communications&utm_campaign=a376280a81-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2024_09_09_06_16_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_-28b65c7f80-372055147

⁵ Real genocide is occurring today, livestreamed from Gaza. Wars and famine, magnified by climate collapse, daily impact the world's most vulnerable people, such as in Sudan and Haiti. The crisis and opportunity of the moment is a call to all Christians, lay and ordained, to take up our "responsibility for acting and living out our Christian faith in these circumstances." <https://sojo.net/magazine/august-2025/why-wouldnt-we-resettle-white-south-africans>

⁶ From the novel The Brothers Karamazov.

Jesus assured us that not one hair of our head will fall without God knowing it,⁷ and there is no need to fear those who can harm us bodily.⁸ The only One to be feared is God.

Today, in much of the world, the policies of nations are in deadly conflict with the word of God. When we hear Jesus say, "I have come to set the Earth on fire," he's asking if we are ready to burn with his zeal and face the peril it entails. We pray, "by your cross and resurrection, you have set us free." Are we free enough to share in Christ's passion? What's holding us hostage? What idol do we bow to?

May the light of God's presence shine forth in us. Amen.

⁷ Luke 21:18

⁸ Matthew 10:28