

August 7, 2022
Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16
Luke 12:32-40

The Assurance of Things Hoped For

Have faith. Trust in God. Believe that God is at work and up to something good. Have faith. For the sake of your community, for the sake of your family, for the sake of everyone, everywhere, have hope that God is big enough to handle whatever is ahead.

Have faith, we say. But what does it mean? Does having faith mean that you have a certain kind of faith? Or that you go to a certain church?

Does it mean putting a bumper sticker on your car or a symbol on your social media accounts, or standing up in front of others to say what you believe? For some, it might. Last weekend, Zeb and I went to Columbus, Ohio for the Regional Emmy awards. This event honors reporters and journalists in the Ohio Valley area, and Zeb was nominated for a documentary did on the special places that are both natural areas and historic sites in KY. His entry didn't win, sadly. But I noticed that when a few others received awards, they got up and thanked their Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Those were the first words out of their mouths. And I admit, I was kind of surprised. I leaned over and tried to talk about the

theological appropriateness of this with Zeb, but he told me to SHH and enjoy my cake. But I couldn't stop thinking about it: What did this statement of faith mean? At the Emmy awards? In the middle of swag bags and tuxedos and golden statues? Is this what Jesus meant? Is this what faith and hope in God are about?

Faith, according to our reading from Hebrews today, is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. It is trusting God is with you. As you pray for courage on the first day of school. As you take a deep breath before going to work. As you whisper for God's help in the doctor's office. It's the hope that there is something out there good ahead of us. Like the hope Abraham and Sarah had as they headed out to find God's promise. Even though they were too old and too barren, as good as dead, it says. God was going to make a family out of them in a land all their own, though it was highly unlikely and against all the odds. That's where faith resides. In the most unlikely of places with the most unlikely of people. When we can't be sure of anything, so we take a leap into thin air, and trust there is someone to catch us. Though we can't see where, or know for certain how. Even in loss, we can pick ourselves

back up. After failure, we can keep going. After mistakes, there can be forgiveness. After death, there can be life again. We are crazy optimists and fools because we believe that God can do something with anything. God's promise is a promise to us to always be our God.

Talking about faith though, can be dry. Often faith is just a credential for people. An affiliation. A box that you check. Your faith is a Baptist one or a Catholic one or a Presbyterian one. You believe in a certain theology and a certain catechism. You believe in a certain way of doing baptism. And a certain method for communion. Faith means faith in correct religion and practice. It means having faith in whatever your church says about sin or science or gender roles or politics. Faith that is less certain, that is more dependent on God, that sees things only at a distance; that kind of faith gets lost in our need for things to be concrete and black and white.

But faith isn't about what we can see. According to the Bible, faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. It is not a conclusion we reach in the end. It is the beginning of a journey. It is Abraham and Sarah, leaving their home to go to a strange, new,

unknown place. A place they can only see at a distance. That they travel toward for years. But never arrive. It's for the generations to come to get there. Abraham and Sarah set out for a promised land that was promised not to them, but those who would come after. To a family bigger than they could imagine. Bigger than they could comprehend. Though they were childless and homeless, their children and their children's children would never be. If they had faith, and believed what God told them. Faith is hoping in the promise in the distance. It means trusting that where we are now is not where we are meant to stay. It is only one point on the journey with God. This time, this place, this church gathered here today. This is a spot where we stop to look and gather strength and remember the land God promised. The kingdom we yearn for, where the families of the earth will be blessed. And we will be at home. And all the problems and struggles will be over. Like Abraham and Sarah, we must leave what we know for what we don't know. We must leave what is comfortable and familiar. What is easy and automatic. We must leave behind what we think we know and learn to not know. And just trust in the promise of something right and just for us and for those to come. A

place where there will be million, million ridiculously hopeful people like us; who are ready for something better, something good and divine for others in the world. And for all of creation.

Abraham and Sarah had to go from where they were, and leave behind what they had been. They had to let go of their plans for the future, and trust that God knew what to do. They had hand over their own ideas about where they going, and believe that God knew where they were going. Imagine that. Imagine having to have faith like that. Imagine God telling you, “I’ve got a new place for you in mind. Trust me. I’ll let you know when we get there. You can’t see your future now. But don’t worry. Your descendants and all who come after you will love it.”

Imagine it. Imagine leaving what you know and wander around for decades. Like a nomad, living like as a stranger, a foreigner; never quite at home wherever you are. Always looking ahead, knowing there is something bigger, something greater. Telling yourself that God made you a promise and that God was going to keep it.

That is faith. It is holding out for God. It is knowing that God made a promise and insisting that God will keep it. The word faith in Greek

means conviction. It means having someone's guarantee on a piece of paper. And they are legally bound to keep it. That promise is a promise, and if anyone can keep a promise it's God. Even if the promise seems impossible. Faith is believing it anyway. Like children. Who believe without a doubt that God can do impossible things. God can send manna from heaven and multiply loaves and fishes. God can get you through the Red Sea and 40 years in the wilderness. God will get you through. And it's all the generations who come who will remember it.

Faith is assurance of things hoped for. The Greek word for assurance is *hupostasis*. The root of it means standing underneath. It is the foundation. It is what holds everything up and it is the thing on which everything stands. Our hope is built on God. We trust in God. Not in ourselves. Not in our institutions. Our strength comes from God, from the grace beyond us. I have learned this from our refugee families from Afghanistan. They have to depend on something bigger. They must hope in a future beyond themselves. And they don't have their hearts set on what is now. They hope in the future. In their children's future and their grandchildren's future. A promise for those yet to come.

Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. It is something beyond us that we are always traveling towards. It is not something we build a castle around and try to preserve. Faith does not mean isolating ourselves from the world or staying put. It is knowing our true treasure is not here in these things. It is out there beyond where we can see. Beyond this world. Beyond this life. And we are nomads, traveling to that new home God has promised us.

Faith is believing in something we can't see. Believing there was a family he couldn't see and a land for his home he couldn't see. What if Abraham didn't believe in what he couldn't see? What if he couldn't imagine anything else? What if he couldn't imagine a new country and a million descendants? What if he couldn't believe that his family would include us? And all of those who would be his children, stretching across the ages? All of us, strangers and foreigners and dreamers, adopted in, hoping and praying for a place to call home? Who could have imagined it would lead to us? That his faith would lead to more faith and more faith and more faith?

Faith means trust. It means believing God is faithful. It means continuing to hope in that promise in the distance. Even in your doubt and worry and fear; you keep going. You keep doing what you believe is right. Even when friends turn on you and enemies hurt you. In spite of despair and disappointment and rejection. In spite of your community denying you and the religious folks condemning you. In spite of the cross. In spite of the grave. Because of Jesus, there is reason to hope. There is reason to believe in GOD'S faithfulness. And God's promise to be our God. NO matter what. We have a kingdom to call home. We see that promise in the distance. We stop and we remember that God is always leading us there. Day by day. Generation after generation. To a destination we don't yet know. A kingdom that hasn't yet come. A treasure that is not of this world, but beyond it. That no thief can steal, and no moth can destroy. And our job, says Jesus, isn't to be right. It isn't to know everything. Our job is to be faithful. To look ahead to what matters. To hope for a place to belong. What are you hoping for? What promise are you waiting for in the distance?

Our faith is in a God who is bigger than we can imagine. Bigger than what we have or what we own. Bigger than what we can see right now. And we are called to come and discover it. To leave behind our security and our certainty. To leave behind what we know and join up with the least and last and those who are counted out. Those in the wilderness, in the refugee camps, in foster homes and shelters, washed up on the shores of Eastern KY. All who need God to be more than they can imagine right now. Praying they will find a place to call home. A place at the table. A treasure beyond the treasure of this world, in a kingdom beyond our sight.