

INI

Hebrews 11,1-10

Lent 2 – 1 March 2015

Greeting: To those who are called, sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ; mercy, peace, and love be multiplied unto you. Amen.

We hear a portion of the Epistle lesson from the Letter to the Hebrews, which was read earlier:

Now faith is the assurance of *things* hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. ² For by it the men of old gained approval.

So far the reading. Let us pray: Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of our hearts, be acceptable in Thy sight, O LORD, our Strength and our Redeemer. Amen.

Introduction: For many people, life is about minimizing risk. It might be hard to eliminate risk, but minimizing it is more than possible. For example, new automobiles today have warning devices which tell you if you drift out of your lane, automatic braking if you get too close to the vehicle ahead of you, headlights that can bend, automatic braking systems, cameras that let you see when you back up, much less sensors that beep to tell you if something is behind you when you are backing up, air bags in front and on the sides, and a host of other features. Cars are safer today for both the driver as well as for the passengers than they were ten or twenty years ago. People want safety and they are willing to pay for safety.

When we go on a trip we check things with Google Earth and Google Maps. When we travel we have GPS. We're prepared. We know where we are going. We have assurance in the technology at our fingertips. Risk and unpleasant surprises are minimized

What about risk in religion, or spiritual matters? I think it was the Danish philosopher, Soren Kierkegaard who said that faith was like a leap in the dark. That implies no small amount of uncertainty. However, is that what God tells us in His Word? The answer is, “No.”

As far as spiritual matters are concerned, God has given us faith so that we might be assured that He is with us. As a matter of fact, God has always been with His people. This great faith chapter in the Letter to the Hebrews shows us that our God is the same in both the Old and the New Testaments. In fact, the faith that is spoken of in the Old is the same as that spoken of in the New.

This brings me to my sermon theme for today, “**One God, One Faith, Two Testaments.**” I’ll develop this theme in three parts:

- 1) Faith Depends On The Word**
- 2) Faith Endures Hard Times;** and,
- 3) Faith Receives The Promise**

1) Faith Depends On The Word. When he leaps out of an airplane, a parachutist depends on his parachute. Generally he packs it himself so enure that everything is correctly packed and that at the right moment after he leaps from the airplane it will deploy at the correct altitude. After he leaps out of that airplane, there is nothing between him and the approaching ground. It is essential that his parachute operate properly.

In the same way, a believer depends on God’s Word. That is implied in the first verse of our text for today. Our text speaks of “the conviction of things not seen.” There is to be no doubting in regard to things that are not yet in view, or, “things not seen.” But yet, this is not to be a leap in the dark – no leaping out of a spiritual airplane without a parachute!

A week after He had risen from the dead, Jesus said to the

disciples and Thomas, who were still hiding behind locked doors, “Blessed are they who did not see, yet believed” (John 20,29). As a matter of fact, every Sunday we stand and confess, “I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth. But you know something. Even though we confess in God, yet we cannot see God.

In fact, as we go on to confess that we believe in “Jesus, His only Son our Lord,” we realize that we cannot see Him as well. Nor can we see the third Person of the Trinity, the Holy Ghost, even though we confess that we also believe in Him.

We cannot see into the future, whether it is five minutes from now, five hours from now, five days from now, or five years from now. But even though we cannot see into the future, with confidence we confess that we await “the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.”

And so it is with us as it was with Abraham, who lived some 3,500 years before Jesus but,

... when he [Abraham] was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going.

On what did Abraham depend? Abraham depended on God’s Word. It could not have been easy for Abraham to leave his extended family and go off to who knows where – no GPS or Google Maps for Abraham. But Abraham knew Who had called him and Who was guiding him.

What about Noah? God told Noah to build an ark out of gopher wood – and build it in a place where there was no water! That goes against reason, doesn’t it? But the reason was the coming flood and destruction of the world. But yet in building the ark and in gathering the animals, Noah “did, according to all that God had commanded him” (Genesis 6,22). He believed God’s Word in spite of what his reason might otherwise have told him. Why? Because when God speaks, we can

always depend on His Word.

God also tells us that

... the worlds were prepared by the Word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible.

Interestingly enough, the Greeks did not like the idea of creation out of nothing. And neither does today's scientific community – but for different reasons than the Greeks. After all, according to human logic and human experience, how can something come out of nothing?

But yet “by faith we understand” that God indeed create all things out of nothing. What is impossible with man is possible with God. He holds all things in His hand — whether we can see it or whether we need an electron microscope to see it. His word is so powerful that when God said, “Let there be,” what became, came out of nothing (Genesis 1,2ff).

We know that humans and their words can make mistakes, be in error – not so with God. Our feelings can at times deceive us. Experiences can sometimes create doubt in us. But God's Word is trustworthy and creates confidence.

Now we see that faith depends on God's Word, but God also would have us know that

2) Faith Endures Hard Times. There are Christians who believe in the prosperity Gospel, which tells people that if they are believers then they should be healthy and wealthy – they should engage in possibility thinking, which can only see a rosy future where all things go well. But if one believes this, even Scripture says one will be disappointed.

But we know all too well that from a human perspective that not only doubts in God's promises can undermine faith, but also all sorts of

troubles can weaken faith. But we also know that he who trusts in God's Word does not necessarily always stand on the sunny side of of the street.

How did it go with Abraham's faith and obedience? Abraham wasn't always a welcome guest in the lands through which he traveled. He lived as a stranger in a strange land (Genesis 15,13). In effect, today we would call him stateless. He didn't live in a permanent building – a beautiful house or a castle; rather, he lived in a tent.

Even though Abraham was stateless, He went towards a Land of Promise. But for decades Abraham wandered. Indeed, the only piece of land that he could say he owned was the grave site he bought for his wife Sara. But in spite of all the hard times, Abraham kept going. “By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed.”

Abel endured more than hard times on account of his brother Cain. Cain was jealous of his brother and his brother's faith. Cain's jealousy grew into hate, and hate ended in Abel's murder.

Noah endured 120 years of hard times. A 120 years was the time that God gave the world time to repent while Noah was building the ark. But instead of repentance, the world mocked Noah and his family. Today we'd probably call Noah and his family “fanatics” and shun them and laugh at them.

Our faith can also be beset with troubles on a daily basis. The Scripture makes clear, that just as the saints of the Old Testament, as Christians we are strangers and aliens on this earth. Sooner or later, we'll have to leave planet earth. Many Christians today are as was Abel – they are martyrs for the faith.

Mind you, the troubles do not have to be as dramatic as martyrdom. Unemployment or underemployment can make us question our faith. The world may label us as fanatics and haters because we

insist that there is but one way to heaven, and that is through Jesus. If one is in school, one may face ridicule to say that by the Word of God the heavens were created, and just didn't evolve in a cosmic crap shoot over billions of years.

While being the objects of persecution or mockery is not pleasant, God would have us be strengthened by Him as we remain rooted in the faith to which we have been called, just as the saints of old. "But those who wait for the LORD will gain new strength" (Isaiah 40,31). For us, God's Word should be our spiritual food and the joy and delight of our hearts (Jeremiah 15,16). Thus, in spite of whatever difficulties there may be in this world, we may go on with assurance and know that

3) Faith Receives The Promise. "Now faith is the assurance of *things* hoped for."

The same hope that we have is the same hope that belonged to the saints of the Old Testament. They had more than an earthly hope and an earthly expectation. They hoped for something more than just the Land of Promise, Canaan.

Abraham lived in tents,

for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose Architect and Builder is God.

Abraham as well as Isaac and Jacob lived in tents so that they would always be reminded that,

For here we do not have a lasting city, but we are seeking the city which is to come. (Hebrews 13,14)

They were strangers in a strange land so that they would not forget that they had a better and permanent heavenly fatherland.

Through faith, all these saints – Abel, Enoch, Abraham, and a host of others – all of them received the same promise of heaven. All of them placed their confidence in God’s Word, even when it seemingly was difficult to do.

All of them died in the one true faith. Just as we, they all believed in He Who would come from the seed of the woman and Who would crush the head of the wily old serpent and win for all freedom from sin and the curse of death. This is He Who has also redeemed us, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, in Whom all the promises of the Scriptures find their “Yes” (2 Corinthians 1,20).

All believers receive the promise of a future, eternal life. This is the reward of grace which God gives to those who are His (verse 6).

And here we should remember how much our salvation, as well as the salvation of all believers, cost God. It is as Paul says, “we have been bought with a price” (1 Corinthians 6,20). Our redemption was bought with the life blood of God’s beloved Son.

Conclusion: About AD 160 Marcion died in Rome. He was a brilliant but flawed heretic to Christianity. Among other things, he taught that the God of the Old Testament was completely different from the God of the New. The Old Testament God was wrapped up in Law and punishment. On the other hand, the New Testament God was about Jesus and love.

Marcion would have thrown the saints of the Old Testament on the trash heap of those lost. But Marcion was wrong.

God’s Word begins with Genesis and end with Revelation. It is a reliable and trustworthy narrative of God’s dealings with His people.

Though this historical record, we see saint after saint called by God to a living and saving faith in the promise of the Seed of the

woman, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Faith always has as its object Jesus, the Promise of the Old and the Word become flesh of the New.

Faith depends of the Word of God, by which He called His Old Testament saints.

Faith endures hard times, because hard times cannot cause us to doubt the dependability of God's Word. It is as Paul says, we enter God's Kingdom through much tribulation (Acts 14,22).

Faith receives the Promise and clings to the promise, the very Son of God. Here we have Him Who died and rose again to win for us the forgiveness of sins, a promise renewed again this morning as He shares with us His true Body and Blood, given and shed for the forgiveness of sins. And here in this forgiveness, we have what Abel, Enoch, Abraham and a host of others have – life and salvation. Our faith is not a leap in the dark, it is a walk in the Light of the World, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Now, the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

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