

Hebrews 11:1-3,8-16

1 Faith is the reality of what we hope for, the proof of what we don't see. 2 The elders in the past were approved because they showed faith.

3 By faith we understand that the universe has been created by a word from God so that the visible came into existence from the invisible.

8 By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was going to receive as an inheritance. He went out without knowing where he was going.

9 By faith he lived in the land he had been promised as a stranger. He lived in tents along with Isaac and Jacob, who were coheirs of the same promise. 10 He was looking forward to a city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

11 By faith even Sarah received the ability to have a child, though she herself was barren and past the age for having children, because she believed that the one who promised was faithful. 12 So descendants were born from one man (and he was as good as dead). They were as many as the number of the stars in the sky and as countless as the grains of sand on the seashore. 13 All of these people died in faith without receiving the promises, but they saw the promises from a distance and welcomed them. They confessed that they were strangers and immigrants on earth.

14 People who say this kind of thing make it clear that they are looking for a homeland. 15 If they had been thinking about the country that they had left, they would have had the opportunity to return to it. 16 But at this point in time, they are longing for a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore, God isn't ashamed to be called their God—he has prepared a city for them.

May God bless to our understanding the Words that we hear today.

Working on this week's sermon gave me time to think about the what a big word FAITH is. I know It's just five letters, but the implications, the meaning, what it is, how we have it, why we have it is huge. We talk about having faith, living in faith, keeping the faith, leaps of faith, acts of faith. I started to think about how people talk about faith. And I tried to get a handle on what I think and feel about faith so I thought that maybe if I looked up some quotes about what other people have said maybe that would help me, maybe I would find THE definitive meaning of Faith. I found some profound and whimsical thoughts on faith

JM Barrie, the author of Peter Pan said "All the world is made of Faith, and trust, and pixie dust"

"Never be afraid to trust an unknown future to a known God." WWII prisoner of war survivor Corrie ten Boom

Christian writer Max Lucado said, "Faith is not the belief that God will do what you want. It is the belief that God will do what is right".

Baptist Theologian William Newton Clark: Faith is daring the soul to go beyond what the eyes can see"

And perhaps my favorite that is not attributed to anyone. Fear ends, where Faith begins."

While these were all interesting views of faith, they still didn't feel like what I was looking for. So I did what I often do when a word seems to elude my grasp. I went to the Merriam-Webster on-line dictionary where I found that faith can be both a verb and a noun and there were three definitions for the word faith. The second definition is the one I was most excited about. It said that faith is a (1.): belief and trust in and loyalty to God (Those were the words I was looking for, to put some

shape to my feelings. Belief and trust and loyalty to God. Will you pray with me please?

May the Words of my mouth and the meditation of all of our hearts and minds be acceptable in your sight O Lord. Our Rock. Our Redeemer. Amen

We are people of faith, even when we can't put it into words. Our faith may feel a little wobbly sometimes, we may not always trust it, we may wonder if we even have it. We are all on different paths of our faith journey so some of us may have that sense of complete trust, and some of us may still be moving in that direction seeking to understand our faith, to figure out where we fit into this story of faith.

Have you ever doubted your faith? I know that I have. Is my faith good enough, big enough...especially when I am confronted by the superheroes of faith, Abram, Sarah Esther, Daniel, pretty much all of the prophets and the disciples from the Bible and all of the superheroes I continue to meet every day in my life's journey. There are some folks who are just so darn FAITHFULL aren't they? And I have no idea of how to live up to that or live into that sometimes...Those fabulous superheroes of faith with their wonderful flowy faith capes floating majestically behind them...I'm pretty sure that sometimes my faith cape is an old bed sheet flapping in the mud...

Today's reading from the Letter to the Hebrews, sounds a lot more like a sermon than a letter. It sounds like a pastor who is working very hard to encourage his little church... an early Christian community that had already endured persecution and hardship... trying to encourage it as it started to falter in its enthusiasm and faithfulness. They were tempted to go backward instead of forward, so the writer, of this text wanted to encourage them to keep on keeping on...and to draw

inspiration from the great heroes of their faith. The writer of Hebrews wanted his listeners to know that they too were superheroes of faith...even if it felt like their capes were dragging a bit in the mud.

~~It is an interesting question isn't it.~~ How do we keep the faith...what should our faith be or look like? How do we know if we have it? Well, we can take some of our faith inspiration from these words too. Because honestly, our daily lives kind of drag us through the wringer sometimes don't they? We, each in our own way have faced some hardship and persecution. At home and at church our enthusiasm falters and we wonder if it has something to do with our faith, or our lack of faith. And trust me, as a pastor I sometimes wonder how I can keep encouraging you to have faith when you are faced with "stuff" time and time again.

How do we keep our faith in faithless times? Belief and trust and loyalty to God

In the hard times in life I have often reminded myself to go back to the heart of my faith. Jesus, Emmanuel, God is with Us! I take comfort in the fact that God loved us so much and so didn't want to lose us that Jesus was sent to return us to God, and if there is a God who loves ^{us} me that much, loves ^{us} me just the way ^{we are} I am, I can root my faith there, I can hold onto the assurance that God's purposes will unfold right before my eyes.

You know, three years ago I had no idea that a place named Greenbelt even existed, I had no knowledge of Greenbelt Community Church or its people. Three years ago all I knew was that my job as pastor of my then church was going to come to an end. That they had money to pay me ~~full-time~~ for another six months and then I would be cut back to part time, which was something that we could not afford. It was a difficult, sad time and my faith was called into action. I had to keep reminding myself that Jesus never promised that life would be easy or without

bumps, but that he did promise that in all things he would be with me. My faith was in that assurance but I assure you, I cried and I got angry and I questioned and I probably even shook my fist a little bit, but I had faith that God would get me where I needed to be when God needed me to be there. I had faith in faith.

And I know, in the grand scheme of things, that was a simple thing, I wasn't facing death, I wasn't facing a long illness. But that's the thing...it will be something different for each of us but the thing that is the same is Faith: Belief and trust and loyalty to God

And I think I am able to trust that faith because of looking backward. Like our writer today says, look back on those folks who came before you – our ancestors in faith –our friends, our family, even ourselves look at what they, what we endured – and ^{we} ~~they~~ persevered! Faith: Belief and trust and loyalty to God. By faith, they endured and accomplished great things, by faith – by trust in God's purposes – they suffered death; they were destitute, persecuted, tormented; but – by faith – they did incredible things. There are many examples of biblical super heroes, but I bet that each one of us can think of a modern day equivalent. Each one of us can probably name our own superhero of faith.

(Super hero)

What makes these stories so powerful for me, is remembering that these folks were not super-human – they were human beings, flawed, weak, and sinful, all the same things that we are. And life didn't always work out for them the way they planned, and honestly, God does not promise that things will work as we plan, but in all things, God will be with us always. God is faithful to us and we need to have faith in that.

It is not about superhero sized faith, it is about having our faith in a God who loves us, and that faith, is enough. Hallelujah Amen