

All Saints Episcopal Church  
Salt Lake City Utah

August 11, 2019  
The Rev. Canon Steven C. Andersen

YEAR C, Proper 14

Isaiah 1:1,10-20, Psalm 50:1-8,22-23, Hebrews 11:1-3,8-16, Luke 12:32-40

**Hebrews 11:1-3(4-7)8-16**

<sup>1</sup> Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

ON FAITH

There are very few lines of scripture that I can quote from memory. Oh, I know most of the stories, and can always find the things I am looking for. But I am not a very good memorizer. And I honestly do not have the motivation to memorize more than I do. But in today's readings, is the exception to my general avoidance of memorizing scriptures. It is a line that I wanted to always remember, and to know where I could find it. It is chapter eleven, verse one, from our Hebrews reading this morning. "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."

I think faith is incredibly, incredibly important. It is not possible to be a Christian, a follower of God, without faith. And faith is essential, in a bedrock, foundational, practical kind of way in our daily life. If we have no faith, then we can have no God.

There are two other words, that are often used as synonyms for faith. One is knowledge, and one is belief. But neither knowledge or belief is the same thing as faith. And I think that the distinction is important. Knowledge and faith

are actually at the opposite ends of a spectrum. The more that something is known, the less faith that is required. If I know that this ambo that I am touching and seeing is made out of wood, it requires no faith whatsoever to make that conclusion. Conversely, if you were to tell me that there is a baby blue Corvette out in our parking lot, it would require some amount of faith on my part to believe that, as I cannot see it from here, or otherwise know for myself the truth of the matter.

And believing in something is also not the same thing as having faith in something. Believing is a lower level, no consequence, no buy-in kind of deal. I am convinced that the earth is some 93 million miles from the sun. I believe that. I also believe that there is an Eiffel Tower in France although I have never seen it. I, and we, do believe in all sorts of things, large and small. But these things have nothing to do with faith. Because mere beliefs cost us nothing to hold. We have no skin in the game, it doesn't matter in any significant way. Ultimately, we could care less about the truth of these matters. We can change beliefs hourly, without cost or consequence.

This single verse from Hebrews defines faith so well: "Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." By definition, faith is about things that we do not know to be facts, and for the most part cannot know. And, if we do really know something, then there is no need for faith. And here is where faith is vastly different from mere belief. Faith is that which

compels us to act, as if it was a fact. In other words, matters of faith, are things that we do not know and cannot know, the truth about, but yet we are so convinced, so compelled, that we are willing to act – to commit ourselves, just as if we knew it to be a fact. “Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”

As it turns out, the most significant of things in human existence, are matters of faith. We do not have the luxury of irrefutable knowledge. And mere belief is too flimsy to risk our souls and the things that are most precious in life. Is there a God? Does God care? Why do we suffer so? Is there a point to life? Is there something after this life? Is there any purpose to any of this? Or is it all just wishful thinking, because we cannot bear the alternative?

Faith is also inextricably linked to hope. Faith directs us to what we hope for. And as such, faith always points us in a positive direction, from wherever we are. If I am sick, I hope to get well. If I am hungry, I hope to be fed. If I am sad, I long to be happy. If I am lost, I hope to be found. If I am adrift, I hope for direction. If my life seems to be without purpose or value, I yearn to discover that my life does have meaning and significance. Hope also lives in the realm of uncertainty, in not knowing how things will turn out. Hope is always positive, seeking that which improves our lives, and fills our lives, with joy and fulfillment. Hope knows no limits. Hope is not just for little things, but for our biggest dreams. We can hope, and we can dream, for the biggest things of all.

The opposite of hope is resignation, and despair. When we have no hope, we are resigned that things can't be any better. When we lose hope, we despair at the prospects for our lives. Living becomes mere existence; painful, and devoid of joy and fulfillment.

I very much believe that one of our most serious ailments, both individually, and as a society, is the smallness of our dreams, and the scarcity of hope. If we do not have dreams of a better world, what motivation do we have for participating? And if we lack hope, either for ourselves, or for each other, have we not resigned ourselves to failure?

God is the source of the biggest dreams possible for humankind. All that we can possibly know and see and understand, are but tiny pieces of the whole of creation. We can barely comprehend the majesty of what we do experience: the beauty of this earth, the wonder of love, and the miracle of life itself. How big of dreams are too big? Our grandest dreams take us beyond ourselves, and our own lives. It is a running joke, that in beauty pageants, when contestants are asked what they hope for, the universal answer is world peace. It is funny, because it is too ambiguous, it is too big, and it is too impractical a thing to legitimately hope for. But the truth is, inside of all of us, we share that same hope. We believe in common, that life is a gift from God, and that it is inherently wrong to wage war and kill each other. We laugh at the prospect of world peace, because we lack the hope that it is possible. We lack the faith. But that is our

failing; and God tells us otherwise. In Matthew's gospel, Jesus tells the disciples about the power of faith: "For truly I tell you, if you have the faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, Move from here to there, and it will move; nothing will be impossible for you."

Faith also turns us from being focused on our own lives, and points us to bigger dreams and hopes. Our lives are important and have purpose, but not in isolation. We are incredibly important as a unique strand in the tapestry of creation. Indeed, our biggest dreams and our grandest hopes are far beyond our individual lives. It is through our faith, that we can transcend our mere individual lives, and be delivered into the realization of these biggest of dreams, and the grandest of our hopes.

Two more things about faith. Faith has to do with the future. It is about the possibilities of the future, and what we do with our lives as we look to that future. Other than examples, our own faith has nothing to do with the past, and not much to do with the present. Faith gives us a perspective, an attitude about the future. Ours and everyone else's, for a long time to come. And because the future hasn't happened yet, anything is possible. You can leave the disappointments and failures and hurts from the past behind. You may today be entangled in trouble, suffering hardship, or facing adversity. But don't you dare place your faith in what is now. Faith is about the future, and things you can't

possibly know about. Faith is about hope, and big, outrageous dreams beyond your wildest expectations. You can't dream too big for God.

Finally, faith is about trust. A good friend of mine, from this congregation, who passed away a few years ago, said she always translated faith as trust. I like that. And it is in this trust, that we lay all of our fears, all of our concerns, and all of our anxieties in God's hands. Trusting God to take care of us, frees us from the bondage of fear. Trusting in God, we can emerge from our hiding places, to participate, fully, with joy and enthusiasm, in the life that God has made possible for each of us. Faith, as trust in God, delivers us from anxiety in even the biggest of our concerns, such as death. Our death is a pending certainty, as it has been since the moment we were born. Tony Campolo, a pastor and well known lecturer, had this to say about trust in God. "It is the bane of our existence that we are able to conceptualize death. Animals don't think about dying and, therefore, they don't suffer from anxiety. You don't see a squirrel hopping along, in a state of existential angst, worrying about death. He just hops and hops and hops, and one day he drops over dead. Not like human beings who are afraid of death. As we look forward to the future, we often see death in very dismal terms. It is this that Jesus came to change. He called upon us to believe that after death there would be resurrection, there will be newness of life. "Who so ever believes and trusts in me, says the Lord, though they be dead, yet that person will live." That's the good news of the Gospel: death does not have the final say. As you

look to the future, know this: that in Christ there is newness of life beyond the grave.”

So trust in God. Never lose hope. Dream big dreams. And live your life in the faith that God will fill this life with joy and purpose and fulfillment; and deliver you to life everlasting in God’s eternal kingdom. Amen.

