

Aug. 8, 2010

Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16

## “Faith is the Victory”

Two weeks ago Pastor Bromleigh, even while on maternity leave, joined us for worship and preached the message. She quoted from an author who calls Americans a “**refrigerated people**”—and helped us reflect on the impact of our widespread summer air-conditioning use, both for ourselves and for the world overall.

Then, last Sunday I suggested we might call ourselves the **People of Stuff**, since we positively SWIM in the vast sea of our possessions. We found Christ’s parable about the rich fool has something to say to us about the dangers of “stuff”. We can slip into a kind of idolatry of “stuff” without even realizing it.

Today, let’s remember another title we go by: “**People of Faith**”. That’s one we are familiar with, and one we are proud to claim. Gathered here this morning, we are folks either exploring or embracing the Christian faith.

Let’s be clear about what we mean when we use the word “faith”. There are two components to faith. First, faith involves some kind of idea or precept which is believed to be true. But faith is not limited to a belief inside your head. Faith is also an impulse in your heart that leads you to act, to behave, to live in ways based upon that belief being true.

Keep in mind that the term “faith” is generally applied only to situations where the idea or precept is something that can’t be proved. It’s not faith if the belief is some obvious FACT. It’s faith, when the belief can’t be objectively proved.

An example: I am not acting out of faith when I eat a sandwich. I eat a sandwich because I believe that I have a mouth equipped with teeth to break it up and bring it into my body. I trust that I have a digestive system that can handle it, and that my body can utilize the nutrients for its benefit. These are ideas that have been researched and proved to be true. I don’t have to take any kind of LEAP to act in ways based on the truth of these statements. FAITH, you see, always requires a LEAP. No LEAP, no FAITH.

Everyone takes leaps of faith in life. It’s not possible to avoid this. The question is not: Will I have faith in something? The question is: What will I

have faith IN? We've discussed this in youth gatherings I have led over the years. We've listed names of famous people, living and dead, and then, based on what we know of their lives, we've tried to come up with where they placed their faith. We'd often come up with beliefs like these:

*Money is power, and power will make my life what I want and need it to be.*

*Sex sells- bringing in money, which is power, and power will make my life what I want and need it to be.*

**These beliefs** can't be objectively proved. But many people cling to them religiously, and live according to them with deep devotion. All kinds of wild leaps are made every day by people praying they will turn out to be true.

Another example of faith is found in our relationships with near and dear ones. We live each day making decisions and choices based upon our belief that someone near to us loves us. Can we PROVE this person loves us? Can we objectively measure or quantify that love? Of course we can't. It's intangible. But is it real? The heart of faith breathes "Yes! I know this. I trust this." And our actions reflect our belief. And each action is a LEAP of FAITH.

It's tricky to talk about faith, isn't it? The writer of the New Testament letter to the Hebrews knew this. Much of the letter is devoted to discussing "faith" and acts of "faithfulness". Our Scripture for today tries to put this mystery into words: "**Faith is the assurance of things hoped for.**" What we cling to in faith can't be proved, yet faith includes a deep conviction that their truth is real and can be trusted. "**Faith is the conviction of things not seen**".

We all live by faith—the question is what do we have faith in? We gather here each week to proclaim the **promises** God has made to us. We talk about them, pray about them, try to see and understand them more clearly. We place our faith in God's promises, which shine out from Scripture, especially through the life, teachings, death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

But if we stay at the level of just THINKING about these promises as IDEAS, our faith is not complete. Faith must move to the LEAPING stage. That's where what is in our heads takes root in our hearts and shines forth in our lives.

Faith means living our lives trusting in God's promises. What does God promise?

In Isaiah God declares, "You are MINE. I call you by name." **God claims and knows us. God will be with us always**, through raging waters, fiery infernos and on into life beyond death. **Good will triumph over evil. Life will overcome all death.**

Can you imagine how our lives will change if we LEAP forward and **really trust** these promises?

Sometimes we get the idea that living by faith will lead us to be successful in the world's eyes. Faith in money or power is often tied to a hope for accomplishment and recognition. But our Christian faith promises nothing in that regard. Things we do or undertake may appear to fail; things may unfold in ways we never expected; we may face discouragement and disappointment. But the Christian promise is that living by faith means living in victory. Because, you see, **faith is ITSELF the victory. Faith IS the victory. Believing and living in God's promises is our accomplishment. The LEAP we take is our triumph!**

Hebrews gives us many examples of what has occurred "by faith" throughout the history of God's people. Rev. Leonard Sweet shares a summary:

*Where was the victory for Abraham? When he took his first step on the journey to the promised land. The rest was commentary.*

*Where was the victory for David? When he took that first step forward and aimed his slingshot toward Goliath. The rest was commentary.*

*Where was the victory for Noah? When he... drove the first nail into the ark and claimed God's promise. The rest was commentary.*

*Where was the victory for Moses? When he took the first step away from Pharaoh's family and joined his own oppressed people. The rest was commentary.*

*Where was the victory for Esther? When she took that first step, marrying [the] king..., placing her in a [position] of power to help her people. The rest was commentary.*

*Where was the victory for Mary, the mother of Jesus? When she...told the angel, Yes, I will bear the special child God has chosen me to carry. The rest was commentary.*

When Jesus came to Golgotha, the place of the skull, beaten, bloody, staggering, gasping for breath, he faced the greatest test of his faith. There was no **proof** that all would turn out as it did. Jesus himself took a **LEAP OF FAITH**, allowing himself to be nailed to the cross, asking God to forgive his executioners. The proof of all God had promised him could only be made by the leap. Jesus leapt. And the rest is commentary.

We are called every day to take steps and leaps of faith. Faith is the victory. Our trust in God is the victory. May God's Holy Spirit deepen our trust, so we can step forward every day in faith. Amen.