

Holy Trinity Lutheran Church Des Moines, WA August 11, 2013

Hebrews 11:1, 8-10

Followers of Christ Trust Where God Takes Them

1. Look at our journey through life
2. Hebrews shows another way
3. His guide is our guide

Hymns: 584 – 753 – 403

Closing: 333

All Scripture quotations from NIV 1984

Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. ² This is what the ancients were commended for.

³ *By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.*

⁸ *By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. ⁹ By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. ¹⁰ For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.*

¹¹ *By faith Abraham, even though he was past age—and Sarah herself was barren—was enabled to become a father because he considered him faithful who had made the promise. ¹² And so from this one man, and he as good as dead, came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore.*

¹³ *All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. ¹⁴ People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. ¹⁵ If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return.*

¹⁶ *Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.*

It happened again the other day as I was waiting at one of the busier intersections down in Federal Way. As I looked around, I noticed something that always causes me to marvel. A man was crossing the street, and he was blind. At an intersection where I never particularly feel sure for my safety when driving in a car and being able to see all around me, this man was walking confidently forward without being able to see. With cars flying everywhere, he moved across that intersection with steady assurance. It filled me with awe to watch this man navigate along his way.

It also made me think, "What if I were in his shoes? If I could no longer see, could I ever walk like that man?" I highly doubt it. I could only see myself inching forward at a snail's pace, being gripped by fear of what each step might bring into my life. I would worry. I would be tentative. I would doubt with every step. Sight is a blessing that I can't imagine living without.

Here is the thing: while we rely on our eyes to guide us through our daily life, the reality is that in many ways, we walk blindly each and every day as we journey through life. Just think of how many unknowns there really are in your life. We don't know what tomorrow will bring; we don't know what our drive home will bring. Despite all the safeguards we put in place, we don't know what trouble lies in our futures. Despite all our planning, we don't know where life will take us.

Life can change suddenly and rapidly; during a short drive to the grocery store; with a routine visit to the doctor; in an unexpected meeting with the boss at work. There are too many examples to think of, where life changes for people in a blink. We often don't have any idea of what is in front of us.

The question for us to ponder as we think about this is: "How do we walk amidst that uncertainty?" As you walk forward with uncertainty all around you in life, how would an observer describe your walk? Would they see a person walking with absolute confidence and certainty, even with the craziness and uncertainty of life all around? Or would they see someone being affected by it all? Would they see someone going through life tentatively? Would they see a person worrying about what's in front of them? Would they see a person who is constantly doubting where they are headed in life? What would they see?

Acknowledging what a person would observe, at least for me, is cause for embarrassment. It is cause for embarrassment for a person who claims to walk by faith. It is cause for embarrassment based on what we read in Hebrews 11:1 earlier. That verse said that ***“Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.”*** As followers of Christ, we claim to let faith be our guide, yet often we demand assurance before every step we take forward. When uncertainty stands before us, we worry and fret. We stress about every choice that we have to make, wondering if it will be the wrong one. We can turn every decision into a calculation. As we think about life, how often doesn't our security find its foundation in what we can see: More often than not, our confidence and certainty is often based on financial stability and job security. And what is true for us as individuals can also be true for us as a church. In the church that means we analyze membership trends and budget lines. The tangible is often the guide that we hold onto as we walk through life. And because we know that those things can change quickly, we walk tentatively.

But there is another way, and it is shown to us by the writer to the Hebrews. In the section of Hebrews 11 that we are looking at today, we are pointed to Abraham and his journey through life.

Quite honestly, when I think about all that Abraham faced in his life, I don't know how he ever slept at night. His life was filled with tremendous uncertainty. He was told to go and find a new homeland, but he did not know where he was going. He was told that he would be a father, even though he was over 100 and his wife was barren. He was told that he would be the Father of many nations, but he had only one son. Abraham had every reason to doubt as he went through life. He had every reason to worry about his future. What he saw with his eyes could have only given him uncertainty.

However as he journeyed through life, Abraham did not walk according to his circumstances. He walked with confidence. He walked with assurance. He walked like a man who knew exactly what was in front of him. And Abraham walked that way because he trusted his guide.

To understand how he did that, think back for a moment to that blind man I told you about at the start. I marveled at that man's ability to walk confidently in what I viewed as a dangerous and uncertain situation. Yet, I'm sure that blind man thought nothing of what he was doing that day. That is because he was simply walking as he knew how, using the guides that he had been given. That man

could not see, but unlike you and me, his eyes were not his guide. He used the cane in his hands to guide his steps. He used the beeping crosswalk and rush of cars to let him know when it was time to go. He used his memory of steps taken previously to give assurance that he was on the right path. All of those guides allowed this man to walk with confidence.

In the same way, though Abraham could not see where life would take him, he walked each step with confidence. As we marvel at Abraham's journey, which we view as being filled with uncertainty, Abraham thought nothing of what he was doing. That is because he had faith in the guides that he had been given. Abraham had the words and promises of God Almighty as his guide. God had given him direction. God had given him assurance.

Each time that Abraham listened to God, his confidence and his faith grew. It happened so often in his life when Abraham trusted his Guide and good things followed, that eventually there was not a promise or decree from God that Abraham would not follow. He could remember where God had taken him in the past and have faith in where God promised to take him in the future.

What we somehow forget all too often as we journey through life is that the God who served as Abraham's guide, who never let him down, who never broke a promise, that God is also our guide in life. There is no uncertainty about where we are headed in life, because God knows precisely the plans that he has for us. While we might not always be able to see with our eyes what is out in front of us, that doesn't matter, because we are his disciples. We are followers. All summer long, we have focused on what it means to be a disciple of Christ. **Today, we are reminded more than anything that being a follower of Christ means that we trust where God will take us in life.**

He guides and helps us in so many ways. Through his Word, he shows us why we can trust him. Through his Word, he first and foremost points us to his Son. As we see his life, as we see his sacrifice, as we see all that he has won for us, our confidence in God's plans and purposes grows.

Through his Word, he also reminds us of all that he has done already for those who have followed him in faith. We get to see how he guided Abraham and so many others, men and women who were disciples just like us.

And through his Word, he gives us promises to hold onto, promises that serve as our beacon of direction going forward. Through his Word, he tells us exactly where we are headed for -- eternity.

While he might not tell us in advance about every danger and challenge that is on the way, he has promised that he will guide us to our eternal home.

It is not just words that he gives to us as assurance. As we look to the font, we remember our baptisms and what God did for us there. As water was poured over our heads, he made a covenant with each one of us, a covenant that He will never break, to be our Father, to be our Leader. As we look to the altar, we are given the very body and blood that was shed on the cross. Those sacraments are part of God's guidance, they give us certainty of God's guidance as we go through life.

As we consider our lives, there is uncertainty all around. Yet for Christian disciples, there is also the certainty of God's guidance all around. Assured of God's guidance, as you look through the Word, as you use the Sacraments, as you think of your life up to this point, walk confidently as a disciple of Christ. Walk with faith. Walk trusting where God takes you, knowing full well that he is taking you to the heavenly destination that you desire.