

8.10.2025 Pentecost 9 / Hymn Sing Sunday

Pastor Timothy McKenzie

Genesis 15:1-6; Psalm 90; Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16; Luke 12:32-40

“The assurance of things hoped for”

*Grace to you, and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

Today’s service is filled with many beloved hymns expressing the content of the Christian faith. It’s a perfect moment to meditate upon faith and believing. Yet sometimes we can confuse faith and believing with things like doctrines and credal statements. We say, “This is what I believe,” as we read an historical creed or explain a doctrine. However, today’s readings present a wholly different vision of faith and believing. The Letter to the Hebrews presents Abraham and Sarah’s faith as a journey upon which they set out not knowing where they were going yet always trusting in God’s promise of an heir and descendants as numerous as the stars. They walked by faith not by sight.

I’d like to ask, “How is your faith journey going?” I ask because each of us are also walking by faith not by sight. As we journey toward God’s eternal kingdom, we also already know the kingdom within us. We walk in the knowledge that we are children of God while not fully knowing what our inheritance will look like.

How is your journey of faith going? We’re a lot more like Abraham and Sarah than we might realize. We are sojourners passing through this world; we are strangers and foreigners on this earth. Like them, we are seeking a homeland. For all our achievements, our lives remain as yet unfinished, and like them, our lives will end with trust in God’s promise of an eternal homeland.

Genesis 15 reads, “*And Abraham believed the Lord, and the Lord counted it to him as righteousness.*” The Hebrew word translated as “believe” (as in “*Abraham believed the Lord*”) is the root word for “Amen.” To believe is to say like Abraham, “Amen,” convinced that God’s promises are most assuredly real and true.

Today’s reading from Hebrews begins with familiar words about faith: “*Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.*” Faith is both assurance and conviction that God’s promises are real. These words point to an objective reality known only through faith. Faith is the way we know with certainty God’s reality around and within us. Faith opens us to God’s infinite reality always with and in us every moment. The kingdom is within you. God’s kingdom is not a distant dream. Faith is the chart and compass of God’s kingdom in you.

Yet I am aware that faith and believing often run counter to our modern minds. As modern people we are very good at keeping faith and reason in separate compartments. We value scientific reason and methodology to such a degree that we can forget faith is another way of knowing reality. Faith reminds us that we are enquiring into the reality of ourselves and God. Faith reminds us that we are enquiring into the reality of a human community that God creates, because those stars in the

heavens that Abraham looked up to represent constellations of human history and human community that come into being through faith.

When we seek to live by reason alone, we forget the promise given to Abraham of sisters and brothers also on the same journey of faith with us. They are heirs of the same promise, yet throughout history, human beings have excluded, hated, waged war and killed sisters and brothers who are also heirs with us of the promise. Abraham and Sarah's journey reminds us that faith is not a nationalist or an ideological journey; faith is a journey with the God who loves this world. Amid competing ideologies and nationalisms, it is faith that makes us fully human, reminding us we are strangers and foreigners on earth seeking a homeland – community with God and others.

Hebrews is describing the visible and spiritual worlds side by side in relationship. Hebrews reads, *“by faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible.”* I think all of us can readily understand this. In the creative process, the heart and the mind are side by side – they are one. We envision what we desire to create: the composer hears the melody and writes; the carpenter or the sculptor envisions the form and creates. So much of our physical world is brought about through the interplay of our inner spirit and our reason.

So it is with faith: with faith we can change the world. Love, compassion, mercy, and justice all flow outward from faith into the physical world. Faith is a power to change and shape this world. Faith is God's love, compassion, mercy, and justice active in you. Abraham and Sarah's journey of faith risked everything for God's promises and their vision continues to shape our journey of faith.

St. Augustine said it this way, “Unless you believe, you shall not understand” (*Nisi credideritis, non intelligitis*). Faith is the power to live, work, love, create, and act. Faith unlocks reality. Faith is the chart and compass of your journey with God and your neighbor.

What I am endeavoring to say is that we come to know why we live and how to live through believing God's promises. Yet as Hebrews 11:15-16 suggests, the journey can seem frightening. Abraham and Sarah could have never begun the journey or turned around mid-journey. Many never set out on the journey of faith because they may be afraid of leaving the land of their birth, family, or possessions behind. Many are afraid to let go and discover their shared humanity with Abraham and Sarah as one of those stars, the many peoples of this world that God so loves.

Jesus gets at this in today's gospel, saying, *“Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”* Jesus knows our grasping after physical things, saying, *“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”* The kingdom is not revealed in possessions or the land of one's birth. It is an eternal kingdom known only know by believing.

Jesus is right because much of our problem with faith lies in the pursuit of possessions, profit,

and material things as both individuals and as a nation. It is this relentless pursuit of more and more that hinders us from sharing our abundance with others. The journey of faith is not an individual journey; it is the quest for community with God and others.

Notice how Jesus says, “*sell your possessions and give alms.*” Sell them and give to those in need. In a world where possessions reveal class distinctions, education, and our endless social aspirations, possessions make it hard to know who and whose we really are. By saying, “*sell your possessions and give alms,*” Jesus is offering you another way to “deny yourself,” to “forget yourself,” so that you might transcend yourself. So that, like Abraham and Sarah, we might walk through this world by faith.

The image of a purse or wallet describes our hearts as that place where we store “treasure in heaven.” Heaven is already here – in your heart. The kingdom’s compass and chart live in your heart as the grace of faith guiding your journey.

Jesus asks us to “be alert” and “watch,” because only by being alert to the faith within us, do we finally come to know ourselves, the world, and God. Be alert to God’s treasure within you.

How is your journey of faith going? Through faith, you are glimpsing eternity. *Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.*

You live on the edge of eternity. Let go of things. Give yourself for others. And believe.

In doing so, you will always have unfailing treasure to share with others.

Amen.