

Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16

¹Faith is being sure about what we hope for, being convinced about things we do not see. ²For by this faith the ancients were commended in Scripture.

³By faith we know that the universe was created by God's word, so that what is seen did not come from visible things.

⁸By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go to a place that he was going to receive as an inheritance, and he left without knowing where he was going.

⁹By faith he lived as a stranger in the Promised Land, as if it did not belong to him, dwelling in tents along with Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. ¹⁰For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

¹¹By faith Abraham also received the ability to conceive children, even though Sarah herself was barren and he was past the normal age, because he considered him faithful who made the promise. ¹²And so from one man, and he as good as dead, descendants were born as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand along the seashore.

¹³One by one, all of these died in faith, without having received the things that were promised, but they saw and welcomed them from a distance. They confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. ¹⁴Indeed, people who say things like that make it clear that they are looking for a land of their own. ¹⁵And if they were remembering the land they had come from, they would have had an opportunity to return. ¹⁶Instead, they were longing for a better land—a heavenly one. For that reason, God is not ashamed to be called their God, because he prepared a city for them.

By Faith

I.

It finally happened: the dreaded “R” word has been announced. Oh, to be sure, there are some for whom that holds no political advantage, so they redefine the “R” word to something else. The definition for the “R” word has always been two consecutive quarters of negative growth. If you think about it, negative growth is an oxymoron. There is no growth if the number is negative, hence the “R” word: Recession. The economy is officially in a recession.

To make matters worse, inflation has come at the same time as the recession. 10%, they say. But if the government used the same methodology in calculation as they did back in the 1980's, the last time inflation was so high, it would be much, much higher.

Chances are, you didn't need government figures on inflation or the proclamation of economists concerning recession.

If you are retired, suddenly the fixed number of dollars you receive from Social Security and, if you're lucky, a defined pension fund, no longer go as far in meeting your monthly budget. At the same time, any additional personal retirement funds you have *decreased*, so if you have to draw from them to bridge the gap, there will be less chance they will grow back in years to come.

If you are still working, I doubt your paycheck suddenly increased by the 10% inflation rate. You have had to find ways to reduce your spending to make the dollars of your income meet the rising costs of just about everything.

If you are a student, racking up debt while you get your education for your chosen field, you have other concerns. Will you have to borrow still more to finish your courses? Will the paycheck from your future job meet all your living expenses plus the repayment schedule for your loans?

Life is filled with insecurity. Even if it weren't for inflation and recession, most people still had concerns about income verses expenses. There are always other things in our world that are unsettling. Social unrest. Crime. Elections. Changes in technology that seem never to slow down, but only speed up.

Jesus said in the Gospel for today: “Stop worrying about your life, about what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear” (Luke 12:22, EHV). How well do you do with that? Do you worry—just a little bit? Do you ever just want some answers to all the questions of life? To the insecurities of life?

II.

Today’s Second Reading is the chapter in Hebrews in which the writer speaks about the faith of many Old Testament believers. He spends lots of time on Abraham. Some times Abraham must have worried. Some times Abraham must have felt insecure.

“By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go to a place that he was going to receive as an inheritance, and he left without knowing where he was going” (Hebrews 11:8, EHV). Even if they would have had GPS back then, Abraham couldn’t have punched in a destination. God just told him to get up and move to the place he would show him. Abraham went.

“By faith he lived as a stranger in the Promised Land, as if it did not belong to him, dwelling in tents” (Hebrews 11:9, EHV). Today’s First Reading talked about God’s promise to Abraham, then known as Abram, concerning the land of Canaan. God told him: “I am the LORD, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land as a possession” (Genesis 15:7, EHV).

God also told Abraham: “Now look toward the sky and count the stars, if you are able to count them.’ He said to Abram, ‘This is what your descendants will be like’” (Genesis 15:5, EHV). At the time, Abraham and Sarah were already old and had no children. Abraham was convinced one of his servants would end up being the heir of all his possessions.

Of those who lived by faith, the writer says in today’s Second Reading: “One by one, all of these died in faith, without having received the things that were promised” (Hebrews 11:13, EHV).

Abraham didn’t live to see the fulfillment of most of God’s promises. He lived in a tent, as a nomad, in the land of Canaan. The only little chunk of land he owned there was the burial plot he purchased for his wife, Sarah. He never saw descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky. He didn’t see the ultimate heir God promised who would be the One who would be a blessing to all the people of the world. The only promise Abraham ever witnessed with his own eyes was his son Isaac, who was born of Sarah. The son born in Abraham’s old age who was the ancestor of the Savior.

This is why the writer to the Hebrews can state so confidently and so bluntly: “By faith Abraham...” (Hebrews 11:8, 9, 11 EHV). Abraham couldn’t “trust, but verify,” like Ronald Regan did with the Soviet Union back in cold war times. How could he verify what God had promised when it lay so far in Abraham’s future?

III.

Read the history of Abraham in the book of Genesis. You will find a few doubts and insecurities. You will find times when his trust wavered. He was still human. Abraham was scarily human at times. Yet, the writer could say of Abraham, “by faith” he did these things and followed God’s directions. It was a God-given faith.

The people the writer was originally writing to were converts from Judaism. Perhaps that’s why he wanted to call attention to the faith of all these heroes of the faith and the things they had to go through in their own lives.

Christian converts from Judaism faced difficult times. Society tolerated Judaism—even the Roman overlord government tolerated Judaism. Christianity, on the other hand, was not so safe. It was tempting for them to revert to the safety of Judaism and abandon Christian beliefs and principles.

Many young people have left Christianity today, too, just like so many early converts were tempted to do. They leave because they feel Christianity isn’t safe. Society tempts Christians to abandon biblical beliefs and principles. A biblical world view is seen as illogical and

disproven by science. This is where the writer begins today's dissertation on faith. "By faith we know that the universe was created by God's word, so that what is seen did not come from visible things" (Hebrews 11:3, EHV). The writer would begin the same way with modern, skeptical Christians. We know by faith, not by sight. God created all that is—with the appearance of billions of years of existence, though his creation is much more recent.

"Faith is being sure about what we hope for, being convinced about things we do not see" (Hebrews 11:1, EHV). The most important promise of God is the promise that he has sent the Savior who has taken away the sins of the world. We cannot see that with our own eyes any more than Abraham or the other ancient believers could. They looked ahead in faith. God promised to send a Savior who would take away the sins of the world. We look back at the written history of how God's plan of salvation came to be. Jesus was born without sin and lived a sinless life so that he could be the sacrifice to pay God's penalty for the sins of everyone else. That's what we read in our Bibles. The same faith Abraham had believes the same promise of God—now a promise fulfilled.

IV.

Jesus talked about the things Christians are sure and convinced about in today's gospel. "Provide money bags for yourselves that do not become old, a treasure in the heavens that will not fail, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. ³⁴For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Luke 12:33-34, EHV). The treasure for a Christian is the ultimate treasure—heaven. Worry about the things of this life takes a Christian's eyes off the final prize. Make Jesus your treasure. Perhaps there will still be daily worries in your heart, but now they will be put in perspective.

Those heroes of the faith the writer spoke of in our text had their daily worries in perspective, too. "One by one, all of these died in faith, without having received the things that were promised, but they saw and welcomed them from a distance. They confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth" (Hebrews 11:13, EHV). Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and many other heroes of the faith the writer mentions, all died without seeing the promise of Jesus fulfilled. They understood, however, that God's promise was sure and certain. Abraham, for example, knew that he wasn't just a stranger and a nomad in the area of Canaan where he lived in a tent. He was a stranger and a pilgrim on earth. The rest of those who lived "by faith," as the writer described them, knew the same thing.

"Instead, they were longing for a better land—a heavenly one" (Hebrews 11:16, EHV). Their faith solidly pointed them to something far better to come—heaven. The same goes for you. Heaven is your *real* home. Knowing that your treasure is there, all the worries and concerns of life get put into perspective.

The writer goes on: "Instead, they were longing for a better land—a heavenly one. For that reason, God is not ashamed to be called their God, because he prepared a city for them" (Hebrews 11:16, EHV).

Adventure stories or adventure movies often show the hero going through adversity. There are unknown dangers. There are frightening things. Watching or reading what they endure is sometimes scary. But its also invigorating.

That's the adventure of faith: frightening, but invigorating. God offers us only the security of his love—the security of his promises. Like the heroes of faith, we haven't seen the end yet. We still live in the impermanent tents of nomads and strangers on earth, still seeking a better land—a heavenly one.

When God calls us home, after all our adventures, he will not be ashamed to be called our God. Amen.