

Title: The hopeful journey of faith.

Scripture: Hebrews 12.1-2

Theme: The hopeful journey of faith requires us to trust God and his plan, even in those times where it makes little or no sense.

Readings:

[Gen. 12.1-4a NIV]

The Lord had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you. "I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." So Abram went, as the Lord had told him...

[Proverbs 3:1-6 NIV]

My son, do not forget my teaching, but keep my commands in your heart, for they will prolong your life many years and bring you peace and prosperity. Let love and faithfulness never leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart. Then you will win favor and a good name in the sight of God and man. Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.

[Hebrews 12:1-2 NIV]

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Introduction:

How many of you wake up in the morning excited for another day full of disorder and chaos? You jump out of bed and say to the world: "Yes another day where I have no idea where I'm going or what I'm doing, but I'm excited about the prospects!" I dare say not many of us live that way intentionally. The world itself is too scary and uncertain to allow it. Each day it's something

new and different to worry over and try to figure out. Always negotiating a new reality based upon the prevailing culture and direction of the masses.

Society and cultures do things differently and outside of the context of the Biblical story. We, like the two men we are going to see today are being challenged by God to venture in a different direction. One that is counter-intuitive to our world's way of thinking. Last week we looked at love and how we are to operate in that as we journey through life. I told Pastor after service that he had set me up pretty well. I got a word from God last Sunday morning about the hope and faith found in our main scripture from the letter to the Hebrews. Pastor last week spoke on love and reminded us from 1 Corinthians 13 that we were left with three things: Faith, hope and love. The greatest being love. Today, because God knows just what he's doing all the time, we are looking at hope and faith. Even when we are uneasy and feel like things are out of sorts, God is in control and has a better plan for us than we could imagine or dream up on our own.

The Story:

The human race has been spiraling out of control since the days of Adam and Eve. That fateful choice in the garden that brought about the removal of God from his rightful place was taking its toll. We see even a mere 11 chapters into the story of God just how bad it had gotten. In chapters one and two we see the creation and God's "good" proclamations over all he had made. In chapter 3 and following we see sin enter the picture as humanity chooses to do things their way and are by their own choice separated from fellowship with God. Cain kills Abel causing further chaos. People become more wicked, to the point where God sends a flood as judgement leaving Noah and his family to start things afresh. Things continue to spiral down and in Genesis 11 God, seeing that humanity is capable of doing anything they wish messes with their speech. The tower of Babel begins the journey away from being one people to becoming many tribes and nations. These few names that I have listed are familiar as we read through Hebrews 11. We can't visit them all today, but they all have a story to share. I would encourage you to be reading in the scriptures during the week. Pick one or two of these heroes and look at what God did in and through them. I am focusing on Abraham and Moses today because they are key to understanding our faith journey. The one of New Covenant and New Exodus.

To get a good understanding of our main text lets go back to Genesis 11 where our story really begins. The Scriptures tell us:

Now the whole world had one language and a common speech. As people moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there. They said to each other, "Come, let's make bricks and bake them thoroughly." They used brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar. Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves; otherwise we will be scattered over the face of the whole earth." But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower the people were building. The Lord said, "If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other." So the Lord scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city. That is why it was called Babel—because there the Lord confused the language of the whole world. From there the Lord scattered them over the face of the whole earth. [Genesis 11.1-9 NIV]

This is the result of humanity doing things their own way. But God is a God of faithfulness and love. Therefore we always have hope. Again, *fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith.* [Hebrews 12.2a] Faith hope and love are what we are left with so we journey on with those in mind.

1-Abraham:

Abraham or Abram's story picks up right at the beginning of the next chapter of Genesis. I call it the door hinge of history. The Scriptures say:

The Lord had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you. "I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." So Abram went, as the Lord had told him;... [Genesis 12.1-4a NIV]

Here is God beginning his rescue mission. Humanity and the world would never be the same because Abraham went. Thomas Cahill in his book: *The Gifts of the Jews* captures this so well. Much better than I could. In speaking on Genesis 12.1-4 he says:

"...For Avram (Abraham) however, Haraan was to be but a stage. What is odd about this passage is the assumption that the family's destination is to be 'the land of Canaan', a hinterland of the Semitic tribes, who (at least in Sumerian caricature) ate their meat raw and didn't even know how to bury their dead. No one whose family was established at Ur would have thought to leave

it except for a similar city. So what we may be witnessing here is a migration in the wrong direction, a regression to simpler roots from which the urbanized Semites who had settled at Sumer had been cut off for centuries.

But this particular migration would change the face of the earth by permanently changing the minds and hearts of human beings. (Pg. 59)

Right here we have the beginnings of the hopeful journey of faith. He left Ur and Harran for the wilderness because of a voice and a promise. Having no idea where he would land, Abraham left all that was sure and headed out into the unknown.

Transition:

Have you ever faced that challenge? Not knowing quite where you were going or where you were to be? Challenges in careers, relationships and moving your family. Our world is unsure, unstable and at times downright chaotic. I assure you, the God who calls you by name is not. He didn't look down at Abraham and yell: "Hey you!" Unlike all the other god's - little g - of his day, this one called him by name. That got his attention and his trust.

Knowing that God has our lives in his hands and in control is comforting. While we may think everything is falling apart and out of control, God has other plans. He always has. Abraham ventured out and was blessed because of it. He went because God had made a covenant promise with him and he believed it. Some years later we encounter another person headed in what looks like the wrong direction.

2- Moses:

So here we are, descendants of Abraham waiting for the covenant promise of God to be fulfilled. There's only one problem. We are slaves, and have been for over 400 years. Our situation hasn't gotten better with time, in fact it has become more and more hopeless. What's more, the king decided that there are too many boys being born to our people. He's issued the order to exterminate all of the boy's born to us. Let's pick up the story in Exodus. The King of Egypt is afraid that the Israelites are going to rise up and take over so he gives orders to the Hebrew mid-wives to kill all boys who are born. At risk of their own lives they choose to disobey and are honored by God with his protection. So Pharaoh decides to take a different root and tell his people to toss all the boys into the Nile river. It's about right now I'd be wondering just where God is and what about the promise he made to Abraham. But God's plan requires faith. Our hope is that he is always faithful. Exodus 2:

Now a man of the tribe of Levi married a Levite woman, and she became pregnant and gave birth to a son. When she saw that he was a fine child, she hid him for three months. But when she could hide him no longer, she got a papyrus basket for him and coated it with tar and pitch. Then she placed the child in it and put it among the reeds along the bank of the Nile. His sister stood at a distance to see what would happen to him. Then Pharaoh's daughter went down to the Nile to bathe, and her attendants were walking along the riverbank. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her female slave to get it. She opened it and saw the baby. He was crying, and she felt sorry for him. "This is one of the Hebrew babies," she said. Then his sister asked Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and get one of the Hebrew women to nurse the baby for you?" "Yes, go," she answered. So the girl went and got the baby's mother. Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take this baby and nurse him for me, and I will pay you." So the woman took the baby and nursed him. When the child grew older, she took him to Pharaoh's daughter and he became her son. She named him Moses, saying, "I drew him out of the water." [Ex. 2.1-10 NIV]

The courage that it took for his parents to do what they did is seldom understood. They risked the death of the entire family by keeping this boy alive. They trusted that God would do the same as they sent him on his way in a basket on the Nile. Can you imagine a mother's heart as she watched her son float away? But they trusted God and this is captured by the writer of Hebrews:

By faith Moses' parents hid him for three months after he was born, because they saw he was no ordinary child, and they were not afraid of the king's edict. [Hebrews 11.23 NIV]

You see the hopeful journey of faith often requires risk. Sometimes we will be tested to our limits with the call of God. It will seem to risky to take the steps of faith we know we should. However, it's more dangerous to be outside of the will of God. I would rather be in a dangerous place IN God's will, than sitting in my living room OUTside of God's will. Being outside of God's will is actually the bigger risk. Moses's parents knew something that others didn't and they believed God would protect and deliver them. Amazingly enough their child was given back to them and they were paid to care for him.

Moses takes the time to explain his salvation and rescue by caring and tender hearted women as a beautiful example of how much God watches over his people. So it's really no wonder when the time comes and Moses looks out over the people of Israel, that he immediately goes to their defense.

One day, after Moses had grown up, he went out to where his own people were and watched them at their hard labor. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his own people. Looking this way and that and seeing no one, he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. [Ex. 2.11-12 NIV]

Sadly, the next day he takes off into the wilderness. For forty years he shepherded sheep, got married, had kids and learned what it really took to lead people. Not exactly a road map to success as we would see it. But it was God's will. Moses knew God had a plan and that he was part of it. It took time, but he believed that when God said he would be the one, he meant it. The writer of Hebrews puts it this way:

By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward. [Hebrews 11.24-26 NIV]

Moses left the Palaces of Egypt for the wilderness because of a call and a promise. He never set foot in the promised land while he was alive. Yet he journeyed on with his people. They complained and they wanted to go back to Egypt. Moses rose above the chaos. His hope was in God and he led them forward to the land God had promised Abraham all those years before.

Transition:

Abraham and Moses: two ordinary men called and made extraordinary by God. That happened because they believed God and his promises even when it didn't look like it was going to work out. A good many times as they journeyed toward the promise it looked as though all was lost. Yet they hoped and held onto their faith that God was faithful if only they would be obedient. Remember no matter what, God knows the solution to problems you don't even know you have yet. These are just a few stories from the lives of these great men. I want to encourage you to read the stories in Genesis and Exodus of Abraham and Moses. If there was time to look at other heroes of the faith from Hebrews 11, I would. I challenge you to read about them as well.

So with that, I want to give you three key take aways today as we look at hope and faith:

Take away number 1- If God calls us to leave our place of comfort it is because he has something better for us

It's hard to understand this as we live in a culture that shies away from anything that may be uncomfortable. We don't even like to have hard conversations sometimes with people we should. Abraham and Moses both left the most advanced cultures of their time to head into the wilderness. Abraham from the comfort of Ur, the big city of his day. Moses from the very palace of the King. There is good evidence that he was in line to be a Pharaoh of Egypt. Both of these men took what looked like career killing moves because they trusted God and his promises. Where are you being challenged by God in your life? What areas are you being called to step into or step out of? Know that the God of Abraham and Moses is the same yesterday, today and forever. He can be trusted. He has something better.

Take away number 2- If God calls us to things they will always be a bit more than we can handle.

This is what I think keeps most of us from stepping out in faith. We have to have it all together. We have to make sure we can do everything we are supposed to do before we launch. All of our ducks have to be in a row so we can insure success even before we get out of the gate. There is a couple problems with that. The first is that you will never have it all together. Oh you'll do the best you can, but you can't prepare for everything. Second, making sure you can do everything before you launch insures that you won't need God when you get there. I'm not advocating doing goofy things and then hoping God will bless. I am saying that if God calls you and you know he is, it will always be a bit more than you can handle. That is what grows our faith. We learn to trust him as we step into his promises.

Take away number 3- God doesn't call the qualified, He qualifies the called.

Every single person in the list of Hebrews 11 had issues. They had shortcomings, quirks and weaknesses. Hey even Abraham out of fear lied about his wife to save his own skin. Moses killed a person trying to convince the Hebrews he was their guy. Not solid character qualities you want in a leader. Imagine those things on a resume! " Threw my wife under the bus to save my own butt. Even let her be part of a harem. Feel called to be the Father of God's children." Pass on that one. Next. "Here's one. Midian desert school of shepherding. Achievements: Got mad and killed a guy once. Feel called to lead people." Remember, the God who calls is the God who qualifies. He's not looking for perfect people, just obedient ones. We have to have faith enough to know that he won't bring us to places, laugh and push us off the cliff. Both Abraham and Moses journeyed in hope and faith knowing God was faithful to his call and promise. It may not have looked good for quite a bit of those journeys, yet they remained faithful to his promises. They stepped into situations that were beyond their abilities and God moved on their behalf.

So as we close today and prepare our hearts, remember faith hope and love all meet in communion. You see, Jesus didn't leave us an idea to remember him by. Some touchy feely thoughts to get us through the tough times. We partake in communion symbolizing the new covenant and the new exodus in hope and in faith that he is coming back. We do now - in the present - remembering his death - in the past - because we believe he is coming back - in the future. This is THE reminder that we are journeying just as the heroes of old who are honored for their faith, yet did not receive what was promised. God has planned something better for us all! A celebration on that day when he will join us all together at the wedding supper of the Lamb.

Have Elders and worship team come down to prepare for communion

I close simply with this: the writer of Hebrews, speaking of these heroes paints a different picture of them than the world does. Where the world sees foolishness and strange people, the writer reminds of of how God sees them.

...the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, living in caves and in holes in the ground. These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised, since God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect. [Hebrews 11.38-40 NIV]