

Faithful Navigation
Oak Grove Presbyterian Church
Rev. Dr. Deb DeMeester
May 8, 2022
Hebrews 11: 1–3...12:2a

Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for.

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.

By faith Noah built an arc...

By faith Abraham went, even though he didn’t know where he was going...

By faith Sarah was able to have a child...

By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau...

By faith Jacob blessed each of Joseph’s sons...

By faith, Moses’ parents hid him for three months

By faith, Moses refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh’s daughter and left Egypt, not fearing the king’s anger...

By faith the people passed through the Red Sea...

By faith the walls of Jericho fell...

By faith the prostitute Rahab was not killed...

And what more shall I say, (the author of Hebrews comments), I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson and Jephthah, about David and Samuel and the prophets, who through faith conquered

kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword, whose weakness was turned to strength and who became powerful...

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 that is set for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith.

A couple of years ago singer/songwriter, Carrie Newcomer, joined with Quaker teacher/author, Parker Palmer to do a show around the country entitled, "What we need is here: Hope, hard times and the human possibility." The purpose of their program was to raise the participants' sense of hope, building on the idea that everything we need to deal in constructive ways with these hard times is already here, already available to us. If they were reflecting on our Scripture reading this morning, they might say "We have the tools we need to persevere, to run the race that is set before us."

Parker Palmer set up the evening by asking, "How do the geese find the strength they need to complete their long, difficult migration?" He suggested their strength comes from two powers that sustain them through hard times: Their homing instinct and their flock. Their homing instinct and their flock.

The first one, instinct, is their built-in "gut feeling," the inner drive inside them that tells them the way to go. They trust that inner drive and it brings them to where they need to be. The other power they have, their flock, offers strength between them. The encouragement, companionship, shared leadership supports them on their long journeys. ⁱ

We are similarly blessed with two powers to sustain us in these hard times: **faith**, that confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see; the model that Jesus set forth for us as the pioneer of our faith. We also have a great cloud of witnesses, our **community**, both seen and unseen; Our “friends on earth and friends in heaven” that beautiful phrase from For the Beauty of the Earth that the choir will soon share. This morning I suggest to you that the wisdom, at the beginning and end of our scripture reading today, can help us faithfully navigate these times, faith and our great cloud of witnesses.

Rodger Nishioka, one of the Presbyterian Church’s great educators, asks, “What if we let hope define our reality instead of what we see? What if we live out the conviction of things not seen?” I would add to his questions, what if instead of passively or angrily seeing what is before us, we look to see where God is at work, to see how love is present, how grace is transforming, how healing is bringing wellness, where passion for justice is unfolding around us?

The geese navigate by following their inner drive and we by faith, the assurance of that which is unseen, that song that is sung above earth’s lamentations, that impulse that was seeded in us as the divine image in which we are each created. Without hope that God is at work in this world, that God is at work in this community, that God is at work in you and in me, we might curl up and hibernate based on what we see in the media. I heard this week about a recent study which shows that we’re exposed to more tragedy in 24 hours than people were in a whole lifetime 25 years ago.ⁱⁱ And that impacts us.

So, where do we find our strength in faith? How do we feed our souls in the midst of this? The gifts of creation are a great source of nourishment, the heavens are telling the glory of God, the earth is awakening with the marvels of spring, the fresh air fills not only our lungs but our souls as

well. The life of Jesus is another source, the great friend who showed up, who trusted women in every part of life, the one who moved beyond margins and saw, really saw, those who were forgotten or ignored, the one who taught us the most important thing is love. These gifts of faith from God the Creator and Jesus the Pioneer and Perfector of our faith give us the energy to keep going. Hope is not only our birthright, but also the energy that compels us to work for God's kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. We believe in the power of love to transform because we've seen it happen...

Which leads us to the second aspect of navigation, the flock, the great cloud of witnesses. On those days when your homing instinct seems less strong, look around you. Look to see where God is at work.

Carrie Newcomer talks about our ability to impact the world about three feet in front of us, we make a big difference right here and as our three feet circles come together, we discover God in this very room, empowering us to share our light, three feet at a time.

As I thought about the great cloud of witnesses described in Hebrews, I found myself adding my own and, especially on this mother's day, I encourage you to do so as well, I think of my great grandmother who listened to her 12-year-old daughter read the Bible as she was weaving and who was struck still at the words, "God will bring you into a land flowing with milk and honey." She asked her daughter to babysit and ran to the cheese factory to tell her husband that she agreed with him that they should immigrate to the United States. By faith they left the Netherlands and came to New Jersey... and my grandfather who was blessed to have work during most of the Great Depression, buying groceries with every paycheck in order to support two other families in his church who had no work. He told no one, we met the families at his memorial service. He brought home what was left and ended up losing

his own home during this time. By faith he did what was right and impacted families who came 45 years later to tell us the story. And I think of Brenda who showed up in Bloomington as the police were moving in on a young Black man just a week after George Floyd was killed and she said to that chief, “there is no need for another young Black man to die at the hands of the police.” And in that three-foot circle, she helped save a life. And I look around this very room, the choir that feeds my soul is on the list, as are the families working to leave a smaller carbon footprint on this world, and the many ways we work for a more just world. By faith the people of my own flesh and blood and this community strengthen me and guide me.

And who would you name? In whose three-foot circle do you find yourself? Who are in the cloud of witnesses who have given you strength to persevere, vision to make a difference, hope when it seems elusive? Who are the ones who taught you to bake chocolate chip cookies or hope when all around seems hopeless?

What if we let hope define our reality instead of what we see? What if we live out the conviction of things not seen and embrace the gifts of faith and community as our tools of navigation in these difficult times? I think we’ll find we do have the gifts we need if we can just attune ourselves to hear that song that is there above earth’s lamentations. May it be so. Amen.

ⁱ Concept adapted from blog post on December 12, 2019 by office of Minneapolis Friends Meeting.

ⁱⁱ Jay Shetty on Ellen DeGeneres Show May 2, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wX6DMNtyt8>