

Following the Footsteps of the Faithful
Hebrews 11:1-13

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Faith.

By faith, Noah built an Ark.

By faith, Abraham fathered a son.

By faith, John Wesley formed a movement called Methodists. By faith, Frances Asbury came to America.

By faith, Green Hill built a home in Brentwood, Tennessee.

By faith, Robert I. Moore led this church to this location.

By faith, what are you and I going to do for the sake of those who come behind us? That's the question I want to pose today.

According to the writer of Hebrews, there are two or three things about faith that you and I ought to know. Faith is the ability to see. It is a set of eyes through which we see the world. It is a set of glasses through which we perceive the reality of the world. Faith is a way of seeing. A kid, who is called in from play for dinner, is asked by his mother to wash his hands before coming to the dinner table. Disgusted by the whole thing, the boy laments, "Germs and Jesus, germs and Jesus, that's all I ever hear around this house and I've never seen either one of them."

For some of us, faith is invisible and impossible. For some people faith is some far-out idea. Occasionally, you and I talk about blind faith. The faith I have in mind for you today is not blind. I am not asking you to do something that is against your good judgment or your good reason. Faith is seeing fully. Sometimes we talk about faith as being some kind of impossible dream or wishful thinking. It is like the substitute quarterback who got into the football game with two minutes left. He glanced up at the scoreboard and discovered that his team was behind 14-0. As the kid was about a quarter way on the field he suddenly runs back to the coach and says, "Coach, do you want me to win this game or just tie it?" The faith of which I speak today is not just a pipe dream.

I have in mind what the writer of Hebrews said about faith centuries ago. Faith is being sure of what you hope for and being certain of what you do not see.

By faith, you board an airplane.

By faith, you drive a car.

By faith, you visit your doctor.

By faith, you came to church today.

By faith, you start a family.

By faith, you invest in the future.

Life is lived by faith.

With the scientific mind-set we say, "Show me and I will believe it." With a

spiritual mind-set God says, "Believe in me and I will show you." If you can believe it, God can do it. While some see things as they are and ask why, the faithful dream of things that never were and ask why not? That is the story of the faithful. Faith is the ability to see. It is a set of eyes through which we see the world, but faith is also something more.

Faith is the courage to act on what we see. There is an old story about a tight rope walker who stretched a cable across Niagara Falls all the way from the American side to the Canadian side. To the applause of a growing crowd, the acrobat walked the tightrope above the rushing, cascading waters that thundered underneath. Then he went back up and rode a bicycle across and even walked it blindfolded. For his grand finale he took a wheelbarrow and playing to the crowd said, "Do you think I can push this wheelbarrow across Niagara Falls?" "Sure you can," came the thunderous response. To which he said, "Well, which one of you will volunteer to ride in the wheelbarrow?"

By faith, Abel offered, Enoch walked, Noah built, and Abraham went out not knowing where he was going but certain he was following the Lord. You see, faith has the ability to see it but it also has the courage to act on it.

Back in 1852 a little group of people felt this new community called Brentwood needed a church and so they organized and established a new church which became Brentwood Methodist Church.

In 1867 this became the first congregation in the Tennessee Conference to vote for men and women to sit together in worship. Prior to that they had to sit apart.

In 1884 they would not let a tornado tear them apart.

In 1936 they would not let a fire leave them in ashes.

By faith, in 1972 on a cold December day with 1150 members, they marched down Franklin Road to this property. By faith, on February 19, 1989, the church voted 608 to 159 to build this sanctuary in hopes the membership would reach 4,500 people by 2000.

By faith, next week with the membership of nearly 5,400, we will determine by our sacrificial financial commitments to double the Sunday school space so this church can become all that God is calling it to be. Faith has the ability to see it and faith has the courage to act upon it.

Homer and Emmy Lou were courting on the front porch swing. Homer was very much in love with Emmy Lou, but he was very shy. He started working up his courage to express his real feelings to her by saying, "You know, Emmy Lou, if I had a thousand eyes they would all be focused on you. If I had a thousand arms they would all be hugging you. If I had a thousand lips they would all be kissing you." Emmy Lou, who was sort of put out by all this rumbling, looked at Homer and said, "Homer, why don't you stop complaining about what you don't have and use what you do have?" Faith is the action we take. Faith is the move we make. Faith is the ability to see it, but it is also the courage to act upon it.

Faith is the determination to endure. Verse 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.” All these people were still living by faith when they died. I think that is one of the great statements of the New Testament. I hope that is true of my life. Still living by faith when I die.

Reinhold Niebuhr said, “Nothing worth doing is completed in one lifetime, therefore, we must be saved by hope. Nothing true or beautiful makes complete sense in any context of history, therefore, we must be saved by faith. Nothing we do, no matter how virtuous, can be accomplished alone, therefore, we are saved by love.”

Significance is not so much fame as faithfulness. So, I have developed a motto in recent years of my life that simply states: *Whatever it takes!* Whatever it takes, let me do it. If there is any good I can do, any service I can render, and help I can give, let me neither defer it nor neglect it, but let me just do it. Whatever it takes for as long as it takes in whatever way it takes. Let me do it.

Of course, many of you know much more about faithfulness than I. For the last sixty-seven years the Scout Master of Boy Scout Troop # 1, which meets at BUMC, has been Billy Jim Vaughn. Chad Drumright recruited him to fill in until a permanent scout master could be found. Perseverance. Billy Jim lived it and has just celebrated his 90th birthday. Billy Jim is history alive and walking. Sixty-seven years, a scout master of this troop. “Billy Jim, how do you persevere? How do you keep on keeping on?” Billy Jim: “This is such a great organization that you just have to stay with it. I have had the pleasure of being here for a long time. If everyone is willing, I want to stay a little longer.” Dr. Olds: “You’re not only looking into the past, you’re looking to the future. I know you and Joy have already made a commitment to the future, to the people who will come after you. Why do you keep investing in the future?” Billy Jim: “Well, I remember the Depression. I remember it very well, when there was nothing. There was nothing. No money floating around, people wondered where to go and what to do, our church had just burned down. We really didn’t have a place to go. But, I saw the women of this church get up at 3 o’clock in the morning and bake cakes and pies and make sandwiches and go down on Union Street to a little building and serve lunch to the business men of Nashville. They did this for months and this was how our church was built. Men came and worked until two and three o’clock in the morning. I know, because I was there. It has probably been the most wonderful thing that has ever happened to this community. What you are looking at and where you are sitting today is, I think, the prettiest church that I have ever witnessed and I have been a good many places around the world.” Dr. Olds: “Thank you, Billy Jim. God Bless You.”

We are pilgrims on the journey of a long and winding road
And those who’ve gone before us line the way.
Will those who come behind us find us faithful? Ah, that is the question. Amen.

