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St. Paul's (WELS) Moline, IL
3:30

Faith Is...

Hebrews 11:1-3,8-16

- I. Seeing
- II. Active
- III. Rewarded

I would imagine that most if not all of you when you left your home to come to church this morning locked your doors. Also, I would imagine that most, perhaps all, of you locked your car doors even though you are parked at church. Why? Quite simply, the world is not a very safe place.

It is becoming more and more difficult these days to trust. It can be hard to trust advertisements which are filled to the brim with fine print: just the other day I heard a report which stated that a lot of people who took advantage of the “cash-for-clunkers” program were surprised to find out that the “cash” in some instances was taxable as income. Many people had a hard time trusting the promises of BP-British Petroleum to make good on its financial obligations in the oil spill cleanup. In the past week or two some three billion dollars was placed into an account by BP to show that they will make good on their promise.

Our topic for consideration today is the topic of faith. Specifically the author of the book of Hebrews tells us: **“faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.”** (verse 1). Sounds good but what is it really saying? It is as if God was saying, “I am giving you an accurate picture of all the world, pointing out and telling you of things you otherwise couldn’t know, and this is how you are to live in this world, and finally this what the outcome of what your life will be. And I won’t show you this but will tell you all of this—TRUST ME.” For many this is too difficult and that is why many people never come to faith and why some people who do believe for a while end up abandoning the faith.

Many in the world are more than thrilled to hear that the heart of Christianity is faith in God. It is not hard to understand. According to the logic of the world faith is believing in something that cannot be seen, touched or tested. For them, the truths of the Bible are disconnected from any reality simply because they deal with things that do not come under the examining glare of science.

How does the world respond to this? “If you want to believe that there is a God who is up in heaven and who loves you fine, then believe that. If you believe that God became a man and died on the cross because of sin and that helps you, then fine, believe that. If you want to believe there is an

afterlife which includes a heaven and a hell, then go ahead believe that. After all these are just some fanciful thoughts that you yourselves cannot be seen but only believed. If all these things help you in your life go ahead believe them.”

But they will go on then to say that all those beliefs are really absolutely no different than believing in the Easter Bunny, or even flying pink elephants. All of them are in the realm of fantasy and not reality so if you want to be so foolish as to go ahead and believe them then so much the worse for you.

At first, it may seem that we are a bit foolish to simply believe the teachings of the Bible. Furthermore, it may seem that we really don’t have much to defend ourselves with.

Perhaps you will agree with me that the American culture in many ways has never been so confrontational and on the attack against faith as it has been in the past ten or so years. To be sure many of our young people and people who end up going to secondary education are confronted with and must deal with such questions and beliefs. How do we as faithful Bible believing Christians encourage one another and especially the youth in these circumstances?

The first thing that we want to remember is that while faith is believing in teachings of the Bible which cannot be seen or “scientifically proven” that doesn’t mean that our faith is blind. Also, it doesn’t in any way mean that our faith is illogical or disconnected from reality. Rather, the call to faith, the call to believe in the teachings of the Bible is a call to believe, logical understandable truths that only God can give us. Lastly and most important of all: everything God tells us in the Bible to know and believe ultimately is understood through and depends on the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

It is certainly not by chance that the author of the book of Hebrews shares with us a fundamental doctrine of the Bible which can only be ultimately apprehended by faith. We read: **“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.”** (verse 3).

God tells us quite simply here that the universe has not always existed and that what is seen and sensed around us was brought into existence by God Himself. This key teaching of Scripture is clear, it is understandable and it is certainly logical. It is logical to think that something like this universe is a product of an intelligence. It is logical to assume that in a universe this complex and intricate that Someone is behind it. In short, in our passage for today God is telling us He is the creator of the entire universe. He is calling us to trust that He really did create it all and He did so merely by speaking it into existence. (see Genesis 1). But more than this, the entire world is really

only understood in light of Jesus, God incarnate. This is why we read in the book of Colossians: **“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.”** (Colossians 1:15-17).

What is the alternative that the world offers to this? In short the world says it has a clear idea of how the world has evolved over a large period of time and that according to them one can understand everything apart from a Creator. According to them they can reason a history of everything going back to a “big bang” from which everything we can see and encounter today comes from. Interestingly these people cannot account for anything prior to the big bang event but call for people to trust them as they work out all the details. It is interesting to note that the most skeptical, atheistic, person today at some point does ask to be trusted in their explanation for everything and to ultimately take their version of the world on faith.

These two explanations for everything couldn't be more opposite: the Bible tells us of the beginning, purpose and end of everything all rooted in God. The explanation of the world really can't explain the beginning, assures us the world has no ultimate purpose and will come to an eventual dismal end. For centuries as God's explanation of the world was believed even the calendar revolved around the birth of Jesus—it is easy to understand why.

Why does the book of Hebrews go from the simple doctrine of the creation to the life of Abraham as quickly as it does? Because the teachings that God gives us in Scripture are always teachings that radically transform our lives and allow us to act in faith. Faith is seeing the world as God would have us see it, but faith is also a call to action on how God wants us to live as well. Abraham is a perfect example of this. Faith is not just believed but it is lived.

“By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise.” (verse 8-9). Abraham lived a life of faith. He did not live a blind life because faith is not blind: God told Abraham to leave Ur and he left for a place God showed him; God told Abraham and assured him that he would indeed become the father of a great nation and Abraham believed God and it all happened. This is why faith is such a powerful thing, because faith changes everything and is a call to action.

We do the greatest damage and undo the very work of God whenever we simply equate faith with mere knowledge. There are a lot of very

intelligent, knowledgeable people and entities that know an awful lot about God but they have no faith. Think of the university professor who knows the original languages of the Bible but does not believe there is a God or that the Bible even records historical events. Are there people out in the world really like this? Yes. Yet their knowledge doesn't bring them closer to God in the least. The Bible gives us a dramatic picture of another high intelligence that lacks faith. James, Jesus' brother comments on the intelligence and knowledge of demons saying: **“You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that--and shudder.”** (James 2:19).

God calls us to greatness because that's what God empowers and equips us for. Today the Christian who believes and trusts God's word has the best understanding of the world around them. They alone are truly living in reality and are truly prepared for the future. This same God who tells us so plainly that out of nothing He spoke everything into existence is the same God who promises us in the Gospel for today: **“You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.”** (Luke 12:40).

We live in a world that God has created good but has been deeply damaged by sin. We live in a world that does have right and wrong and will be judged in the future by God Himself. We live as people who will not disappear or cease to exist at our earthly death but will spend all of eternity either in hell apart from God or in heaven with Him. What makes all the difference? That God became man and died for the sins of the world and taught plainly that everyone who had faith in Him would be saved. Jesus once crucified now risen is the difference!

The final aspect of faith God reminds us about today is that faith in Him is always rewarded. In speaking about Abraham and his descendants, kept believing God and acting on His promises. Why did they do this? **“They were longing for a better country--a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.”** (verses 11-16). Yes, faith that is active is always rewarded.

We live in a world where trust is becoming harder and harder to do, yet it is impossible not to trust in something. God has given us promises, bold promises of life, of hope and of the promise of everlasting life with Him face to face. Amongst those great and bold promises is: **“Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame.”** (Romans 10:11). May you see with the eyes of faith; may you live the life of faith, for surely you will be rewarded for your life of faith. Amen.