

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Amen

Last week, our focus was on fear, worry and anxiety.

- Or better said—Replacing fear, worry, and anxiety by allowing Christ into our hearts to create faith and trust in Him.
- We had said last week, we cannot do it on our own.

Today we want to build on what we said last week by looking at the next step so to speak, a related subject—moving forward in boldness and confidence.

- To not only not fear; but also to live as God’s children and carry out the mission He would have us to do in this broken, sinful world.

The wilderness journey we are on is not easy.

- There are many twists and turns; pitfalls and vulnerabilities along the way.
- We are thrown many curveballs and the script does not play out the way we want it to.

We said last week that we cannot avoid anxiety and worry on our own.

- And this week it is my goal that we would likewise see that we cannot step forward/move out on our own.
- We can’t do it. We can’t handle it.
- It once again is only through faith that He creates in us.

Many of you are facing some difficult conditions and situations.

- I see it in your faces. I hear it in your voices.
- Some have even told me, “I don’t know how I can keep going.”
- I’m trying to be strong but I can’t do this.
- You are right. You cannot do this.
- But you can through Christ who lives in you and gives you faith.

It has always been that way.

- For all of mankind, throughout history, we cannot do it on our own.
- Even the great pillars of the faith only carried on their mission and purpose through Christ.

Today, in our Epistle reading, the apostle Paul gives to us consideration of some of those who have gone before us in the faith and endured the suffering and lived in Christ.

- We can learn from them how they did it, and draw peace, joy, encouragement and strength as we continue on the journey that they have already completed.
- I've entitled this message, "In Faith Following Faith."

Paul gives to us today, examples of 6 people of faith and 2 related events associated with them.

- Today, in the interest of time, we will only look at 3 of these individuals as well as the 2 events made reference to.
- We will take them in the chronological order that they occurred.

The first is Abraham with Isaac.

- Can you imagine what that must have been like for Abraham?
- Abraham was promised a son, and that son was not given to him until he was 100 years old.

And now in our Epistle reading Paul makes reference to God calling Abraham to sacrifice his son.

- What? That doesn't make any sense.
- That doesn't fit with how I thought the story would go.

You ever think that way?

- I know it was You Lord, who gave me life....but it's pretty tough for me to give that life up to you.
- To turn it over to You, and do it Your way.
- I have to live my own life also.

Ever feel that way?

- Ever feel like you have to do it your way. In essence, I can do it on my own. At least, part of it on my own!
- It is as if you are Abraham standing over the altar and God is telling you to give your life to Him.
- And you stop! Wait a minute, Lord.
- This doesn't make sense to me.
- Let me think about this. In effect, let me rationalize my excuses.

Now go back to Abraham.

- God commanded Abraham to offer his only son as an offering.
- Abraham bound Isaac and laid him on the altar.

- Hebrews 11:19, “He did this because he considered that God had the power to raise even from the dead.”
- So BY FAITH, Abraham was ready to offer his only begotten son.

But God prevented him from actually doing that.

- Do you think there were not times along the way for Abraham that there wasn't any uncertainty, and anguish?
- But God kept His promise about Isaac and gave him back from death to Abraham.
- God is keeping His promise to give you back from death to Him also.
- In faith, Abraham dedicated Isaac to the Lord and the Lord provided and took care of the rest.
- We move forward in faith and trust as God would have us to go.

Our second person is the life of Moses.

- His life didn't start out so great.
- For the first 3 months of his life he had to be hidden so he would not be put to death with the other Israelite male babies born.

What about you?

- Well Pastor, I didn't have the best childhood.
- I could have had a better upbringing in the Lord.
- Yet, Moses led the children of Israel

And how did that eventually happen?

- God called Moses, after being taken in by royal Egyptian heritage, he gave all that up for his people and the Lord.

God called Moses to lead the children of Israel.

- Do you think there were not times along the way for Moses that there wasn't any uncertainty, and anguish?
- Remember how Moses responded to God's calling at the burning bush?
- If you want a list of excuses, go back and read that account.
- But God took away the excuses and gave him everything he needed.
- God took away also the easy, comfortable life but gave him faith to follow as God had planned.
- And in the end, God had Moses lead His people from slavery in Egypt and to the Promised Land.

You know for us.....worldly goods and ways are pretty tempting.

- It is easy to forego time with Christ.....and focus on worldly things.
- They can even be fun. Television, the bed, the sporting events, and even Facebook and social events.
- But they are fleeting, they are not eternal. They cannot ultimately be your help and destiny.
- It is easy to become comfortable in worldly things and in essence put our trust in them.

Hear again the words from our Epistle reading as we finish our consideration of Moses.

- Moses experienced the same mockery as the Messiah because he renounced his earthly heritage and looked for the heavenly reward that comes to people of faith.
- By faith, Moses, despite all mistreatment and scorn, looked for, the hoped for, reward.

Moses also then serves as an example for us.....

- For all those that think they were not given the right start in life to be close in step with Jesus.
- For all those who have all the excuses for not following Christ.
- And for all those that are unwilling to give up worldly things that are fleeting for eternal things.
- In faith, Moses moved out trusting in God's plans and that the Lord would provide.
- We move forward in faith and trust as God would have us to go.

Next, we have an event. It relates to Moses.

- The Children of Israel crossing the Red Sea.

Were the Children of Israel perfect in their walk with God?

- No. None of us are.
- Recall in the face of adversity they complained to Moses that it would have been better if they had stayed in Egypt.

But when the Red Sea parted.....they had a decision to make.

- What do they do?
- Stand in fear, stay and complain, go back to their old life, or move out in the Lord.

BY FAITH, they went forth on dry ground and had a safe crossing.

- BY FAITH they received God's protection from the chaotic waters and deliverance from the Egyptians.

- By contrast, the unbelieving Egyptians were destroyed by the waters that had provided a safe way to escape for the Israelites.
- Here we have a contrast between salvation and destruction.
- We see deliverance that comes from receptive faith in God.

Perhaps for you sometimes it is hard to take the next step forward.

- To “step out” so to speak in faith.
- In this example we see that by faith God will provide, God will protect and we are ultimately safe in the arms of Jesus, even to final judgment.
- We move forward in faith and trust as God would have us to go.

Our next example is Rahab.

- Recall her situation.
- A Pagan Canaanite woman and former prostitute.
- She ended up being recognized as 1 of 4 women in the New Testament genealogy leading to Christ.
- Think of who she was and how God used her.

Think of the risk she took and boldness she showed.

- Joshua had sent men to scout the land.
- Rahab welcomed them into her home in peace.
- When Jericho’s rulers tried to apprehend them, by faith Rahab hid them and helped them to escape.

What about you?

- Oh, my past is too tainted.
- I’m nothing but a sinner. I am not worthy. There has got to be a better person than me that God can use.
- What good can I do?

By faith and by her hospitality, Rahab aligned herself with the Israelites and put her own life on the line for them.

- By faith in what she had heard about God and her hope of salvation, she was spared from judgment when the walls of Jericho came tumbling down.
- In faith, Rahab trusted that the Lord would provide and the Lord provided and took care of the rest.
- We move forward in faith and trust as God would have us to go.

And related to all this is our last example from our Epistle reading for today.

- Relating to the account of Rahab, the Children of Israel marched around the mighty, fortified city of Jericho once each day for 6 days.
- And on the 7th day, march around the city 7 times and the walls came tumbling down, the city crumbled and was soundly defeated.

God, you want me to do what?

- That doesn't make any sense to me.
- That will never work.

In Rahab and Jericho.....

- We see the miraculous power of God.
- We see the first city defeated in the conquest of the Promised Land and we see Rahab even privileged to become an ancestor of Israel's Messiah, the Savior of the world.
- We move forward in faith and trust as God would have us to go.

As we think about those who have gone before us in the faith.....

- There is one more group that we need to talk about today.
- Perhaps the ones that you are most familiar with.
- How about our loved ones and those that have been the pillars in the church here at Hope?

Do you see the legacy and encouragement and strength they have left us?

- Look at the stained glass windows and the story they have told us.
- Look at the cross, both above the altar and hanging above the balcony.
- Look at the altar. Look at the baptismal font.

Listen closely.

- Do you hear their words, their praising God ringing off these walls?
- Do you hear their voices whispering in your ears?

As you think back on their lives—the courage and strength they showed us.

- In some cases, carrying burdens and making sacrifices not known or recognized until years later.
- It may be your own personal family, it may be the bigger church family of believers.

Just think about how we conduct our services here at Hope.

- These are influences and things that have been passed down to us.
- By virtue of how things were done in the past, they too have a vote in decisions which are now made.
- They too speak to you. They too teach us and strengthen us in our faith and walk with God.
- In faith, they moved out trusting in God's plans and that the Lord would provide.
- We move forward in faith and trust as God would have us to go.

And, as we think about all those we follow.....we must also speak to the one we are to ultimately follow.

- The centerpiece and One who accomplishes all that we have talked about.
- Our Good Shepherd.
- The One who took in all our sins and went to the cross for each of us so that we may have faith and follow Him in faith.

The next time you think you cannot do something.....

- The next time you feel lost and hopeless.
- The next time you don't know what to do.
- The next time you think you are unimportant and don't matter.....
- Stop and turn and look at the cross.
- And ask for guidance and strength and increased faith from the One who gives you faith in the first place.
- And also remember those who have gone before you in the faith.

Did they have it all together? No.

- Were they at times confused? Absolutely.

But they did it!

- And just like you and me, they did not do it themselves.
- They did it through Jesus who created faith in them.
- Just like you and me, they could not have done it on their own.

Go back, look closely at our Epistle reading.

- Count how many times the words, "by faith" is used.
- And, oh, by the way, this all comes from what is called the faith chapter in the Bible.

We have been given a legacy of faith by those who have gone before us in the faith.

- Will you find encouragement and strength from them and follow them?
- What legacy are you going to leave for those who follow you?

As we begin to bring this message to a close, hear these words as we make our last reference to our Epistle reading for today.

- They are the final verses of our selected reading.
- “Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and sin which clings to us so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the founder and perfecter of our faith.”
- And it ends.....”That you may not grow weary or fainthearted.”

Dear Christian friends.....to close this message.....

- Do you remember the TV show Star Trek?
- Do you remember the opening lyrics to each episode?
- “To boldly go where no man has gone before.”

That’s not us. For us.....

- “To boldly go in faith where those before us in faith have gone.”
- In faith, follow faith. Amen.

(Please stand) And now, may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Having heard the Word of God we now prepare our hearts and minds to confess together the words of the Nicene Creed as found on page 206 in your hymnal.