



northminster presbyterian church

2400 old alabama road
roswell, georgia 30076

12-Aug-2007

SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 11:1-3,8-16 Luke 12:32-40

SERMON: Be Ready! (Rev. Dr. Jim Simpson)

Since our two scripture readings today are about faith, since they are about the need to have faith and the meaning of faith and the challenge of faith and the implications of faith, it will not surprise you that this sermon is about *faith!*

Faith is one of those words that you will often hear when you hang around the church. If you are in a church and you don't hear faith talked about, debated, agonized over, questioned, described, debated, practiced and challenged – check out another church! We use the word “faith” to describe both ‘what we believe’, the “content” of our faith and ‘how we believe’ or the “conduct” of our faith. Faith is both a noun - the substance of things hoped for, as well as a verb - the conviction of things not seen.

At times we will hear faith described as something right here, inside of us, at other times faith is all about what is going on way out there!

Faith can sound like and be a very staid, solid word, spoken with the voice of Charlton Heston. And in the next breath, faith sounds like and is much more elusive, flighty. When it comes to faith, you can just never be too sure. Just when you think you have faith figured out – *bam! Faith takes you in a new direction.* There is a “Peanuts” comic strip where the little bird, Woodstock, flies one way in a crazy zigzag path. Then in the next frame he is flying back the other way in another crazy zigzag path. Snoopy looks at him and says, “Never fall in love with a butterfly.” Faith in the God we come to know in Jesus Christ is very much like falling in love. The butterfly is an ancient symbol for the Resurrected Jesus –faith is very much like loving a butterfly.

What is Faith? A reporter from a local newspaper was doing a story about a woman's 100th birthday and attended her birthday party to ask her some questions. At one point the reporter asked her, “Do you have any children?” She looked at him with a smile and said, “No, not yet!!!!” As the writer of Hebrews put it: “Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” *Faith is God's “not yet!”* God is not finished with us, *God will never be finished with us!* God's plans have “not yet” been fully fulfilled in our lives, but they are on the way! Faith as our “not yet” means that we know that despite how things look at the moment, God is calling us forward to a new beginning.

Faith, *God's “not yet”*, is a challenge for most of us. Most of the time, most of us tend to play things safe, preferring to stay with what we already have, preferring the familiar rather than the unfamiliar. Mostly we are all the same. Even if things are not perfect, for the most part, don't we prefer to tough it out rather than trade the known for the unknown, the certain for the uncertain? And yet in the Bible, time and time again we are shown that faith means saying goodbye to the familiar and setting out in faith in some new direction, a direction that God needs for us to go.

Faith, *God's “not yet”*, is about where are we going? Abraham and Sarah did not know where they would end up. Imagine calling U-Haul and not being able to give them a zip code where their truck will be dropped off?

We know and God knows that the shortest distance between two points is a straight line. But for some reason, God is not a real big fan of straight lines. As time goes by, God does eventually get us from point A to point B, but oftentimes it is by way of a route that we would have never imagined.

Faith is about saying goodbye. Abraham and Sarah had to say goodbye to their home. When Jesus called the first disciples, the fishermen had to say goodbye to their boats and nets before they could begin the new life that Jesus was offering them.

For your faith today, what is it that God is inviting you to say goodbye to?

Is there some destructive habit that you need to end? Is God calling you to a different career or to a different use of your free time or to making free time instead of 'work, work, work'? God would ask you to say goodbye to anything and everything that is holding you back from living more fully and faithfully for God. Saying 'goodbye' in these ways really dredges up some very powerful emotions. As we attempt to say goodbye, we come face-to-face with both the depth of our attachment to something and we can also experience some very negative emotions.

Faith as God's not yet, calling us to a new direction and destination, asking us to say goodbye, can seem surprising in the extreme! A nun who works for a local home health care agency was out making her rounds when she ran out of gas. As luck would have it, there was a station just down the street. She walked to the station to borrow a can with enough gas to start the car and drive to the station for a fill-up. The attendant regretfully told her that the only can he owned had just been loaned out, but if she would care to wait, he was sure it would be back shortly. Since the nun was on the way to see a patient, she decided not to wait and walked back to her car. After looking through her car for something to carry to the station to fill with gas, she spotted a bedpan she was taking to the patient. Always resourceful, she carried it to the station, filled it with gasoline, and carried it back to her car. As she was pouring the gas into the tank two men walked by. One of them turned and said to the other, *"Now, that is what I call faith!"*

Faith as God's not yet, calling us to a new direction and destination, can seem simple yet profound, easy yet hard, containable yet uncontainable. Faith as God's "not yet" calls us, empowers us, makes it possible for us to change the our way of life, and face all that may come our way and find purpose and strength to live life to the full!

A little girl had been shopping with her Mom at Target. She was about 6 years old, a beautiful red-haired, freckle-faced image of innocence. It was pouring outside, the kind of rain that gushes over the top of rain gutters so much in a hurry to hit the earth it has no time to flow down the spout. Several people stood under the awning waiting, some patiently, others irritated because nature was interfering with their hurried day, when the little girl's voice rose above the sound of the downpour. "Mom, let's run through the rain." "What?" Mom asked. "Let's run through the rain!" she repeated. "No, honey. We'll wait until it slows down a bit." The young child waited about a minute and repeated, "Mom, let's run through the rain." "We'll get soaked if we do," Mom said. "No, we won't! That's not what you said this morning," the young girl said as she tugged at her Mom's arm. "This morning? When did I say we could run through the rain and not get wet?" "Don't you remember? When you were talking to Daddy about his cancer, you said, 'If God can get us through this, he can get us through anything!'"

All huddled under the awning were now completely silent, not a sound was heard but the rain. Mom paused and thought for a moment about what she would say. Some might have laughed it off or scolded the child for being silly. Some might have even ignored her. But this mom chose to affirm her little girl's faith. "Honey, you are absolutely right. Let's run through the rain. If God let's us get wet, well maybe we just needed washing." And off they ran, smiling and laughing as they darted past the cars and right through the puddles. They got soaked. But they were followed by a few others who screamed and laughed like children all the way to their cars. Suddenly, getting wet didn't seem like such a bad idea.

Faith is about running through the rain, getting wet, even getting soaked, because God asks us to trust, to have faith, and to get going...

Faith asks us to have spiritual vigilance as we watch for and wait for and prepare for the return of our Master and the arrival of God's Kingdom of love and justice.

Faith asks us to have spiritual vigilance for our neighbors! Waiting for Christ's return we demonstrate a powerful sense of responsibility for the daily care of all those for whom Christ died - watching out for those who cannot protect or provide for themselves: the poor, the weak, the sick, the homeless, the hungry, the lonely, the oppressed and the violated.

Faith asks us to have spiritual vigilance over our own hearts and minds and lives. To be vigilant in identifying and avoiding the myriad ways in which our life choices can alienate us from God and to be vigilant in identifying and cultivating the elements of godly living as we wait for and prepare for our welcome for the Master.

It is the Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom. It is not what we do which earns us the kingdom. The kingdom, Jesus says, *is God's gift.*

Will Faith will mark your response to the gift of the Kingdom? If the response is marked by faith, then you are revealing that you really want to be in the party that is the Kingdom of God! If the response is 'no faith' this indicates a preference for living in a kingdom of your own making.

My friends, I ask you and urge you and encourage you to respond to God, to respond to faith *with faith*, to respond to grace *with grace*. Sell all you have - give alms. Be awake, be prepared, be ready! As you receive grace and as you respond by giving and sharing grace in return then, you are acknowledging that your treasure is in the Kingdom of God. God and God's Kingdom is on the move, on the move in this world, on the move in your life and mine. God's Kingdom is coming so have faith. Be in faith, be faithful as you look for its coming and as you get on board now, living today as if that Kingdom had already arrived in all its fullness.

"Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out." Be dressed for action. Have your lamps lit! Be like those who are waiting for their master to return from the wedding banquet. Be ready! Amen

Hebrews 11:1-3,8-16

1Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. 2Indeed, by faith our ancestors received approval. 3By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible. 8By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to set out for a place that he was to receive as an inheritance; and he set out, not knowing where he was going. 9By faith he stayed for a time in the land he had been promised, as in a foreign land, living in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. 10For he looked forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. 11By faith he received power of procreation, even though he was too old—and Sarah herself was barren—because he considered him faithful who had promised. 12Therefore from one person, and this one as good as dead, descendants were born, “as many as the stars of heaven and as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.” 13All of these died in faith without having received the promises, but from a distance they saw and greeted them. They confessed that they were strangers and foreigners on the earth, 14for people who speak in this way make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. 15If they had been thinking of the land that they had left behind, they would have had opportunity to return. 16But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; indeed, he has prepared a city for them.

Luke 12:32-40

32“Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. 33Sell your possessions, and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. 34For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. 35“Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit; 36be like those who are waiting for their master to return from the wedding banquet, so that they may open the door for him as soon as he comes and knocks. 37Blessed are those slaves whom the master finds alert when he comes; truly I tell you, he will fasten his belt and have them sit down to eat, and he will come and serve them. 38If he comes during the middle of the night, or near dawn, and finds them so, blessed are those slaves. 39“But know this: if the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. 40You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.”

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