

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

The portion of Scripture before us today is found in the letter written to the Hebrew Christians, the eleventh chapter beginning at the first verse:

*Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of 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 Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was commended as a righteous man, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith he still speaks, even though he is dead.*

*By faith, Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death; he could not be found, because God had taken him away. For before he was taken, he was commended as one who pleased God. And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone*

*who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.*

*By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. By his faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.*

*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. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations whose architect and builder is God.*

*By faith Abraham, even though he was past age - and Sarah herself was barren - was enabled to become a father because he considered himself faithful who had made the promise. And so from this one man, and he as good as dead, came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore.*

***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. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth.***

***People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return.***

***Instead, 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.***

Heavenly Father, these are Your words and therefore they are the truth. We pray, Lord, that You would increase our faith through them. Amen.

Dear Redeemed by the Blood of the Lamb,

Having faith in someone or something is a difficult thing to do. Having faith that your spouse will always remain faithful to you. having faith that your child will always honor and respect you. Having faith that you will

always have a job and a steady income. These are all leaps of faith that we take on a pretty regular basis. And they are leaps of faith, because honestly we don't know the outcome. Our spouse could stray, our child could hate, our job could be lost. So many times in our own lives we take a leap of faith... because we have to.

The concept of faith reminds me of Peter. As he is sitting in the boat, having just realized Jesus was approaching him, he had a great amount of faith. He was even able to walk on water, he had such great faith. And yet, once he realized the amount of faith that was required to keep this up... once he realized what he was doing, his faith vanished and he began to sink.

Our children say they love us, but then we start to notice things which would display that this is not the case. Our spouse swears they will never stray, but we start to have insurmountable evidence of the contrary. Our employer assures us that no one will be laid off, and then another round of pink slips come out. And just like

Peter our faith begins to disappear. We are no longer so positive in the faith that we once had.

However, when it comes to God that is exactly how He wants us to know Him... by faith. By faith, He wants us to know that He loves us. By faith, He wants us to know that He is always there for us. By faith, He wants us to be His children. Dear friends, God wants us to live our lives... *by faith*.

I think that it is really easy to say that we have faith in something, but I think it is a whole other matter to actually show that faith. Think again of your children: you have faith that they will always honor and respect you, but let's be honest at a time of punishment there was doubt. At a time of intense anger, there was fear. At a time of jesting, a certain amount of worry can set in. While my talking children are three and two respectively, I have already heard from them that they do not love me. Of course that immediately changes when I tell them that I love them, but still the words come out. And as for honoring and respecting me, let's face it, they are sinners too. Jonah it's time to pick up,

NO. Matthew lets get ready for bed, and the temper tantrum starts. While some of you may write this off to them being a mere five years combined, I think that this is a great way that they show just how sinful they truly are. And yet in one of my leaps of faith, I will maintain that they do indeed love, honor, and respect me and their mother... although they do have difficulty showing it.

And then I look at all the examples in front of us today in our text: Abel, who by faith offered a better sacrifice; Enoch, who was taken to heaven because of his faith; Noah, who trusted and listened to God and built an ark in the middle of the land far from any water; Abraham, who left his entire family because of his faith in God... And I wonder how ready many of us are to do as they did.

Are we ready to be like Abel and sacrifice the best part of what we have (time, talents, treasures) to God because we know by faith that He will return them to us 100 times better. Are we ready to be like Enoch and live a faithful life, even though the world would talk

against and about us? Would we begin to build an ark in the middle of the Fox Valley because by faith we are trusting what God told us?

These may seem like far fetched examples, and yet they are the examples that the writer chose to use. Personalize them if you need to but ask yourself, How strong is my faith in what God would have me do? God would have me sacrifice, but it might hurt or be a burden. God would have me live an outwardly Christian life but that might be uncomfortable. God would have me listen to His words and His words only, but the world does make a pretty good point. You see, it is easy to say that we have faith but putting that faith into action is a whole other story.

In our text, we are told that all the people mentioned had one thing in common... they died in the faith. But faith in what? It was faith in their Savior. And though they had not seen their Savior face-to-face, they still believed in Him. This savior who was promised in the Garden of Eden, “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your

offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.” Cain then brought a firstfruit offering to God... an offering that showed love and honor and respect and adoration and faith in God and His promise. Enoch walked with God and was taken away. Enoch trusted in God for His salvation and knew that His Savior would come. Noah, too, walked with God. He was blameless among the people of his time. He loved His God and knew that only God could provide salvation. God first saved him from the flood and would one day save him through his Savior. To show his appreciation and faith, Noah built an altar to the Lord and sacrificed to the Lord. And then God called Abram. He told Abram to leave his home and his country to follow God and go where God would establish him. He promised Abram, “all people on earth will be blessed through you.” And in all that God told Abram, Abram believed God, he had faith in God, and it was credited to him as righteousness. And then God tested Abraham. He wanted to know that Abraham had complete reliance and faith in Him. So God told him to sacrifice his son. God told Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, and so

Abraham and Isaac took a three day journey. Abraham placed the wood for the sacrifice on the back of Isaac as they climbed Mount Moriah. And as he was just about to sacrifice Isaac, an angel of the Lord appeared and gave him a scapegoat to sacrifice instead. And thus we also see Jesus Christ. Instead of having a person sacrifice their son for our sake, God sacrificed His own Son for us. God had Jesus live a perfect, spotless life. And then when He was condemned to die, Jesus had to carry the wood of the cross up the hill at the top of Mount Zion, which is Mount Moriah. At the top of the mountain, Jesus was sacrificed... Jesus was our scapegoat so that we would not have to be punished. Jesus took our punishment and our death so that we could have life with Him. And then, after being dead for three days, Jesus came back to life. As our writer to the Hebrews puts it in the eyes of Abraham, "Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death." And the world received Christ back from the dead on the third day.

And it is by faith, that we know this is true. We were not there, we did not experience this, but we know this is true. Jesus Christ lived and died for our sins. And then Jesus rose from the dead to show that He has won the victory over death, hell, and Satan. And it is through faith in all that Jesus Christ has done, that we too have heaven waiting for us... just like the believers of long ago.

And this faith is something that God puts into each and every believing heart. He places it into our hearts when we read and hear His Word, when we partake of His very body and blood in the Lord's Supper, and when we are baptized and become heirs of His heaven. It is with these Means of Grace that God gives and strengthens faith in all that He has done for us.

With this faith in Jesus Christ and all that He has done for us, it is now time that we live out our faith. We do acts of love and charity for others. We show the love that God has showered upon us to family and friends. We listen to God, because He would have us be obedient and faithful children.

Dear friends in Christ, it can be very difficult to have faith. In this world everything is transitory, even the believers of long ago knew that. They were not looking to stay in this world, but rather lived here as though they were strangers. And we can take a lesson from them. We can live in this world as strangers. We do not have faith in this world. We do not have the faith of this world. We have faith in Jesus Christ alone. Faith in all that He has done for us and continues to do for us. And we want to live as God would have us... by faith.

Thanks be to God. Amen.