

Barre Congregational Church

August 7, 2022: A Pastoral Message by Pastor Margaret Keyser

~ **Ninth Sunday after Pentecost** ~

“Faith in God is our Assurance”

Our services can be found on our website at www.barrechurch.com and Facebook page.

Scripture Reading: Hebrews 11 v 1-3 and 8-16

I. Introduction:

Sometimes we go through experiences that make it hard to keep our faith in God alive, the kind of faith that gives us the peace that we saw in Philippians 4 v 6 and 7, the peace that is beyond our human understanding. When we go through those personal challenges, things we need to face, things that make us feel uncertain and vulnerable, we often wish we were beyond such circumstances where things are fine, better, easier, resolved, peaceful and joyful. It is the experience of going through the challenging situation that is hard, isn't it? That's when one starts to ask what it means to have this kind of faith that Abraham had when he left his home to follow God's call to go to a country, a place where he and his wife who was at a high age would experience the impossible...become the parents of many nations! Maybe some of you have experienced that kind of faith in your own lives where God showed up in response to your urgent prayers and belief that your circumstances would change. Maybe you read this and say yes, I have been blessed with a faith that moves the hand of God to bestow unexpected blessings upon my life!

II. What is this thing called faith?

The concept of faith can present itself as an unreachable phenomenon, something that only people in the Bible had, or what others, except me, we say, have experienced in their lives. When we study scripture and try to live a life of prayer and faith, we hope that something extraordinary would happen to us also, so that we can say, God heard our prayers, God is with us, and God is amazing! It is encouraging to see how our scripture passage explains to us what faith in God means, and how it manifests itself in the struggles we go through in life. The key word in our text, in the first verse of Hebrews 11, is the Greek word hypostasis, which means substance, and is used in other passages to refer to the substance of God, the radiance of the Son

of God, the foundation on which something is being built upon. A translation of Hebrews 11 v 1, would therefore read, “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for”. Faith is something to hold onto, something firm and real that my heart and my prayer can rest upon and then I can say, “Lord, I believe You hear me, and I believe You answer me, and so I am sitting on this foundation called faith and wait full of hope that You are with me, and that You will come through for me. Your answer may not look like what I expect, but through this thing called faith I know that it will be a blessing, because it comes from You.”

For Abraham it did not mean an easy life, and that his prayers and his faith were without wrestling and sacrifice. Getting ready to sacrifice his son, Isaac, was a real and fearful experience, but his commitment and obedience to God, knowing in his heart that God is with him in this dark moment, was what made him walk that walk with his son ready to be offered. He did not know what would happen. He did not see the outcome then, but he believed in a Living God who will show up. And God did show up at the moment he would offer his son as a burnt offering. That is faith...in a Living God who will show up and reveal the thing (s) we don't see but hope for. Faith, someone said, “is an attitude toward our circumstances, particularly toward uncertainty and want”, and, “By faith we live as if things were other than they appear.”

III. When we walk through the fire...

I went through a personal medical crisis this past week, and the last month which made me go into the basement to pray and wrestle with God, cry, and hope for something different than what I heard could be wrong. I went through moments of darkness, not knowing how things would turn out, and then there were those flashes of hope, knowing that things would work out, feeling God's comforting and powerful presence with me. I had a team of prayer warriors praying with me, here in the US and my family in South Africa, and as I was facing a biopsy this past week, I remember asking God, and the Son, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit with God's angels to join me in my car on my way to the surgeon's office to give me strength and courage I needed. I remember feeling and seeing through my spiritual eye the presence of these Divine beings with me with a determination, which I did not have myself! My prayer was for a good and a different outcome. and towards the end of my spiritual wrestling as I was sitting in the waiting room, I surrendered myself fully to God, and my request to God became more specific...Lord, this is what I want, not that! God heard my prayer and indeed, no biopsy was needed after thorough

exams revealed there was nothing to be concerned about, and the only thing needed was the specific thing I asked for! I returned home speechless and elated because I felt God's presence in that room, and through the gentle and clear explanations of the surgeon, and I knew in faith that God intervened miraculously into my situation. I was exhausted from the many prayers and wrestling and remember feeling like someone who just went through fire and had been stripped from my personal ego and what I know about life and the answers I have, to someone who had been purified and humbled. This personal experience is a reminder of past experiences of God's interventions in my life, and it gives me some insight into what the writer of the Hebrews is reminding us of, that to have this kind of faith, is to become like a baby in God's hands, praying, asking, waiting, hoping, believing, surrendering completely into God's hands and trusting that our God is not far away, sees our hearts, our tears and steps in and takes over to help, and to give hope.

IV. Conclusion

We know that to follow Christ is not all roses. Yes, when we worship God, and sing together, serve the community, it feels so good. When life is good, we pray and thank God in the morning and at night for God's blessings. It is in those dark moments of life where the following of Christ becomes a little harder to do, and when it is hard to imagine that God can or will intervene in our circumstances. To be asked to have faith during such times makes it so hard as we stumble and scramble to deal with our circumstances. The noise of our issues makes it hard to kneel by the cross, in our basements, our bedrooms, our bathrooms, wherever we pray to be in silence and to feel the presence of God in those moments as we weep, and search for answers to our prayers. We do discover time and again, though that those are the moments when God is not far away, but with us to help us have the faith that sees things we hope for, the things we cannot see by ourselves. And yes, it is true that what we want, is not always what God gives us, or reveals to us, but it is true that God is always present and gives an answer. May God help us in our daily lives to seek God in good times and in bad times, to surrender completely and to experience this faith the Hebrews writer is talking about and may God manifest God's blessings more and more in our lives, and in this world as we pray for a better world we cannot always see, and which feels so far from our ideals. Peace to you. Amen