

“FAITH IN ACTION”

Hebrews 12:1-3

Holiday Island Presbyterian Church

October 29, 2017

INTRODUCTION:

First of all, I consider it a great honor to be in a pulpit

On the 500th anniversary of the Reformation.

This is also a special day for me, personally.

On October 31st, 1987

I appeared before a group of pastors

who would approve or disapprove my candidacy

to study for ordained ministry.

I chose October 31st on purpose

because it coincides with date Luther formally began

the Reformation.

At one point in the examination,

I was asked “Why” I was seeking the path to ordination.

I quoted Luther:

“Eich kan nich anders!”

“I can do no other.”

It is an even greater honor to be in *this* pulpit –

That of a faithful church in the Reformed tradition

And among people I love and respect.

I can just imagine the writer of the Book of Hebrews

Sitting down to write the thoughts in chapters 11-12.

The writer began with a long list of those who had been faithful,

Those who passed the summary of their faith

from generation to generation until it reached the writer.

The list reads like a “Who’s Who” of the faithful:

It begins with Abel,

Continues on to Enoch,

then to Noah who was asked to build an ark

and fill it with animals.

And then to Abraham who was asked to leave his home

And take his family to a place unknown to him.

And Sarah who went with him and bore a child

Even in her advanced age.

God tested Abraham's faith

And promised his descendants would be as numerous

As the stars in the sky and sand on the seashore.

The it passed to Isaac, then to Jacob, then to Joseph

And then to Moses.

And through him to the people

who followed Moses into the wilderness.

Then to Joshua, Rahab, Gideon, Samson, David and Samuel;

And all the prophets who spoke for God.

The list is long, and could be even longer.

The names are mostly familiar,

We remember most of their faithful decisions.

**Each name on the list is a person who trusted God
And answered the call to do something
Completely outside their comfort zone.**

**And it is for this reason – the long line of faithful people –
That the writer of Hebrews can say**

“we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses.”

**And the writer goes on to encourage us to keep our eyes on Jesus
And let nothing deter us from living faithfully.
To stay the course and not grow weary and lose heart.**

**When my son was in high school,
He ran cross-country track for a while.
He was pretty good at it.**

**I attended some of his track meets – as many as I could -
And I discovered something very unique.**

As the runners approached the finish line,

When they could see the end of their quest,
They began to slow down . . . even to the point
of walking the last several yards.

There were one or two clever competitors,
Who, instead of slowing down, actually sped up,
Passing those who had slowed down
And moving up in the ranks of finishers.

I passed that information along to my son
And would watch as he would dig deep,
And sprint the last hundred yards or so to the finish.

I used to run the last 50 yards or so with him,
Encouraging him to keep running.
Yeah, made a complete fool of myself . . .
. . . but that was my son out there running!

That seems to be what those on the writer of Hebrews list did –
They ran alongside those who were striving in their faith –
Encouraging them.

**This “great cloud of witnesses” the writer talks about
are standing by, watching, waiting
And with their acts of courageous faith
They are encouraging us to keep moving
Towards God’s goals for us.**

Now, here’s an interesting thought.

What if God decided to “update” the Book of Hebrews.

Who’s act of faith would be included?

Augustine? Thomas Aquinas?

Gregory of Nyssa?

St. Francis?

Joan of Arc?

While we were in Santa Fe,

We visited the Cathedral of St. Francis.

In the courtyard, there is a statue of Jean-Baptiste Lamy –

The first bishop; then archbishop of Santa Fe.

Born in France and serving in New Mexico –

Now *that* takes faith!

He served from 1853 to 1885.

Willa Cather, the author, wrote a book about him

Entitled *Death Comes for the Archbishop*

based on his life and career.

I am fairly certain his name would be on the list.

How about Luther – whose act of faith we celebrate today?

He not only was one of the principals of the Reformation,

He is also responsible for translating the Bible

Into the language of the people.

What about Guttenberg who made the Bible available

To the common folk?

Would the eight members of the band aboard the Titanic

who continued to play “Nearer My God to Thee” be there?

Would Dr. Livingstone be on the list?

How about John Wesley, John Knox?

Or Johnathan Edwards?

How about Billy Sunday? Or Billy Graham?

How about Susanna Wesley, Evangeline Booth,

Amy Carmichael? Corrie Ten Boom,

Joanie Eareckson Tada?

My point is simply this:

If you reflect on your faith journey,

You will discover *someone* who had influence

In your faith development.

It may have been a parent or sibling,

A teacher or preacher,

Or even a writer.

The chances are excellent that God used *someone* to reach you.

That person is – or will be – part of the “great cloud”

That witness what we do as Christians.

I am not saying they will judge us –

But perhaps they will be judged by their impact on us.

Today, we celebrate the 500th anniversary of the Reformation.

The importance of that period of time cannot be overstated.

It is so important that it laid the groundwork

for who we are as Presbyterians.

It is even included in our motto:

Ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda!

‘the church reformed, always reforming,’

according to the Word of God and the call of the Spirit.”

That motto calls us to be ever vigilant –

Always faithful encouraging each other

to keep our eyes on Jesus;

let nothing deter us from living faithfully.

to stay the course and not grow weary and lose heart.

We are to sprint the last hundred yards!

Now, one more question before I close.

**I asked you what if God directed someone
to update this chapter of Hebrews . . .**

**What if that happened 50 years from now . . .
. . . would *your* name be listed there?**