

“Faith Feet ”

Pentecost 13, Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16

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I. FAITH, WHAT? (Hebrews 11:1-3)

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. Indeed, by faith our ancestors received approval. By 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.

II. LIVING THE TEXT

There are a number of things we are taught in “preaching school,” as it were. When one is studying how to “preach the word,” how to exegete scripture, study the context, and then explore its depth and meaning for and with a congregation. In order to bring the good news of the passage to bear on current, everyday, happenings around us in this life—there are steps that are encouraged. Practices that wanna-be preachers are urged to embrace in their own routine.

One of those practices is to “live the text.” To read the scripture passage you plan to preach on early in the week and then live, breathe, pray, meditate on it all week long. Really “get *into* it!”

As I’ve shared with you before, sometimes this plays out in almost *comical* ways. Crazy, unsought-for episodes will occur during the week that somehow, oddly bring it home, bring faith to life, bring the ancient wisdom into the here and now!

So, for this week, I began to meditate on this passage in the Letter to the Hebrews. Actually, it started several weeks ago when Barb, Janet and I met to plan the music for today, with MSG leading the service. “Walk By Faith”. Oh.....walk. Walk by faith!”

What is faith, really? How do we “walk by faith?” What if our faith is weak? Is *our* ability to have faith what determines how things will turn out, when we are in difficult, unknown places? Is having faith the same thing as believing? And what *are* we believing, exactly, if we say we “have faith?”

What if our prayers *aren’t* answered? Not in the way we’d hoped for anyway! Does that mean we didn’t have *enough* faith? Scripture is filled with stories of our forefathers and foremothers who “had faith.” Or, did things “by faith.” Were they super-humans who just struck out

on a path, following God, trusting blindly? Just better people than *we* are, or could ever hope to emulate?

III. CLOSE ENCOUNTERS

And thus, I pondered. And I struck out on a walk with the dogs, three of them—off leash—up the hill from our cabin early this past week. Cuz, *another* thing they teach you in preaching school is to get out of the office, away from the computer and walk and run and bike and your creative juices will come to life and your insights will soar. Wow! “It’s only Tuesday, I thought joyfully! And, I’m deep in thought about this scripture and the message for this week. Awesome!”

“By Faith.” *How do* we walk by faith? What does it mean? How do we have *more* faith, or *bring* faith to bear when we are struggling to believe something will work out? How do we have faith when our prayers seem to fall on deaf ears?

For I was *also* struggling with a challenge in my own life, on my own walk of faith—*praying* for wisdom and guidance and *needing* some answers to prayer—and those answers were long in coming and definitely trying my patience!

Well, I was probably a little *too* lost in thought, and meditating on scripture, when I should have been a little more awake to my surroundings! I suddenly realized there were noises. Noises of the animal kind that were not my dogs just happy to be out for a walk.

“Yip yip yip!” I heard. NOT my dogs. My eyes scanned the hillside, brain counting: 1, 2, 3. Yep, 3 dogs all right here. Oops! FOUR. Number four doesn’t quite *look* like my little Aussies. Ohhhh...

Over on the side of the hill, staring at us and responsible for the yipping. Helloooo, Mama Coyote!!! We’ve heard about you from the relatives. How you stalk the unleashed dogs and warn that they are trespassing on *your* nesting grounds! In *our* neighborhood.

Hmmmm....what to do? My dogs are a *little* too friendly and curious at times for their own good, and they were quite keen to go play with their new-found friend. I quickly called them to me and they actually came and sat at my feet—*that’s* a miracle in itself! I grabbed them by three collars, and they squirmed and wiggled and twisted up my fingers, and then they began to SING! Thought they’d

just join in a little chorus with the coyote! “Not.the.time.for.THAT,” I hissed!

I tried using my best preaching voice to exhort our Visitor to run along. “Go home. Buh bye! Git!” I somehow got the leashes on two of the dogs, only to remember too late that little Mesa’s collar was on the loose side and she wriggled *right* out of it, and joined her brother in romping over to say HELLO! (after the song ended ☺)

Well, then came the moment. I couldn’t believe it had gotten worse. I thought I was dealing with the situation rationally and had things under control, but suddenly they were *out* of my hands and running toward the coyote.

This was the moment of decision. Would they LISTEN to me? Better than they usually do? The Mom Voice reached deep down and dug into whatever faith I had that they would remember what they’d been taught, and yelled, “COME HERE!!!! Mesa! Rango. CUHMMMMME!!!”

And you know what? They did! *Before* they got to the coyote. Before she stepped toward them. Before I completely lost it, or lost *them*! Somehow, they trusted that I was acting in their best interests. They trusted Mom more than their own curiosity. For a change! And they turned around, and came back, and sat at my feet. And stayed with me, close to my heels the *rest* of the day. And I continued to meditate on the message, and what faith looks like. But, I also scoured our surroundings every 2.5 minutes as we walked back to the safety of the yard.

And then I remembered—after the fact, that as soon as we’d first set out on the hillside, I’d noticed they weren’t right with me and turned back and all three had stopped and sat in a line at the gate—NOT wanting to go any further. In defiance. “Really, Mom? Are you sure? Up Here?” They sensed something. Or someone. But I didn’t really listen to them. I brushed off their concerns.

Then, a few minutes later, they’d all 3 stopped again. *Not* wanting to go forward; looking cautiously around. Did I listen? Nope! I was thinking about “stepping out in faith” and *not* trusting that gut feeling that proceeding forward was not wise. How often do you trust your dogs’ gut feeling, anyway?!

IV. BY FAITH, ABRAM

By 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. By 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. For he looked forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. By 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.

By Faith, Abram. Abram—not even *Abraham* yet, for he had not been given his new name by God in those early days—he stepped out. By faith, Abram, trusting in a God he had just *barely* gotten to know, set out for a new land, a new life, a new way of being in relationship with the Holy. A new walk by faith.

Abram didn’t have a Bible—not even a scroll. He didn’t have scriptures to quote, to rely on and give him courage. Stories of others’ experiences of this God, who had been faithful and led them in the past. He didn’t have hymns to sing of great faithfulness, of “all I have needed, thy hand hath provided.”

He had no references, no tweets to track, no Facebook page about this Yahweh God to like, to follow, or checkout the character of—maybe keep an eye on in his News Feed for a few days!

Nope. By faith, Abram had very little to go on. Except faith and a gut feeling. A sense of calling and trusting the one who called.

By faith Abram and Sarah, after a little laughing episode and some protestations about age and barrenness, (What, God?! Us? Parents? You gotta be kidding! The external data we have available to us would NOT support that hypothesis! Maybe we *should* have checked this God’s references!) put one foot in front of the other, and brought forth a son. In the most unlikely of circumstances!

By faith—not in their own ability to believe and trust, but because “they considered the ONE faithful who had made the promise!” Great is THY faithfulness. Not our ability to believe.

V. BY FAITH, US

By faith. By faith, we step out and keep putting one foot in front of the other when:

- the news from the doctors is not what we'd hoped
- we learn that friends have betrayed us
- politics keep going in a way that upsets and dismays us
- violence and fear just keep getting the limelight
- our best efforts don't seem to be enough—whether we are protesting violence or hoping against hope that dialogue and reason and common sense can prevail?
- when we preach and preach about loving our neighbor and neighbors turn on each other even so

By faith, we keep on seeking to do things better.

- Better dialogue
- Better process—sensitive and careful and gentle
- Better ways of treating one another and working constructively together instead of dividing into camps

By faith we buck the tide in our culture, calling for a Better Way. A higher Road. A Third Path. Standing up against the easy default of falling into rancor, tit-for-tat, spewing garbage back and forth instead of finding common ground and working toward true, healthy solutions. By faith, we offer a cloak of love, forgiveness, reconciliation, instead of retaliation when a shirt has been taken. We turn the other cheek—not for it to be slapped again, but to stay at the Table; stay present in the Circle, commit to keep talking, stay in dialogue and work it out.

By faith we offer forgiveness. Not only when the other person has asked for it or expressed contrition. But because forgiveness is the nature of God and relationship. And, ultimately, for our own good, as it frees us from the poisonous cloud of resentment.

VI. BY GOD'S FAITHFULNESS`

We do know God personally. At least a little. More than Abram and Sarah did. We have lived out the promises of God's call and faithfulness before in our lives. And will do so again.

By faith, we have seen and heard of the faithfulness of our Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer. By faith, we are called to step out, step in, step up and live a different, better way than the world around us. Keeping the faith. Keeping our values at the top.

VII. CLOSE ENCOUNTERS—REPRISE

Yesterday, we went back. Two of the three dogs, armed with sturdier collars and leashes and much more aware. For living “by faith” means not just trusting your gut and proceeding cautiously, but stepping out in courage as well. Facing your fears.

We weren't about to let fear of the stranger or of confrontation completely win the day. It was time to face our fears and re-claim our walking path—even if someone else was living there. We could share. Co-exist, learn to get along. We would go near her young and her den. And she could let us have our walk on the hillside in peace.

I can't say we *totally* went the same route and negotiated a new understanding! I didn't want to be stupid, after all! But we took first steps. Faced some fears and started on the path.

By faith, we step out. By faith, we arm ourselves with courage, staying tethered, leashed to the One who is faithful. Having Faith Feet. Step by step, knowing God will lead us, even when we are not sure of the road ahead. Not sure of the outcome. Not sure of who and what we will encounter—friend or foe, or some of each. Or foes that may become friends, who knows?

Life is difficult. It's unpredictable at times—situations catch us unawares—stalk us from the side of the hill. And we choose over and over how to respond—in the moment, and in the longterm. Will we live in faith or in fear? Step out with faith feet, carefully confronting each situation or cower in fear behind our comfort zones?

Remember: **“Faith is not about believing. Faith is having the courage to embrace the morning, trusting that we can put one foot in front of the other and the ground will be there. Faith is about trusting that the Ground of our being is love. (Dawn)**

**Faith is not about everything turning out okay.
Faith is about being okay now matter how things turn out.**

Faith is the assurance (from God! not from our own ability to believe) of things hoped for, the conviction (again—a gift we're given) of things not seen.

“All I have needed thy hand hath provided. Great is *Thy* Faithfulness,
Lord unto me.” Amen