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Living by Faith
Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16

Now faith is the assurance^[a] of things hoped for, the conviction^[b] of things not seen. ² Indeed, by faith^[c] our ancestors received approval. ³ 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.

***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. ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ For he looked forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. ¹¹ **By faith, with Sarah's involvement,** he received power of procreation, even though he was too old, because he considered^[d] him faithful who had promised. ¹² Therefore 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."*

*¹³ **All 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, ¹⁴ for people who speak in this way make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. ¹⁵ If they had been thinking of the land that they had left behind, they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶ But as it is, they desire a better homeland, that is, a heavenly one. **Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; indeed, he has prepared a city for them.***

Feeling any ANGER OR SADNESS about the state of our country or the world lately?

Losing any sleep over it?

Feeling any anxiety?

Religion Professor and author Diana Butler Bass writes in her online *The Cottage* newsletter about meeting a friend for lunch--- and discovering that they were BOTH dealing with a lot of anger, grief, and anxiety over the state of things.

Her friend said she was struggling with nightmares, sadness, and grief. "Am I going crazy?" she asked Diana.

“I don’t know about that....that seems pretty normal in these abnormal circumstances. You’ve got a soul...you are a moral human being.”

Diana goes on to talk about how we are all suffering from MORAL INJURY, something the Veteran’s Affairs department defines as:

“In traumatic and unusually stressful circumstances, people may perpetrate, fail to prevent, or witness events that contradict deeply held moral beliefs and expectations.”

Moral injury. Trauma that violates core ethical beliefs.

Diana Butler Bass, The Cottage, “Serenity...Are You Kidding?”, August 2, 2025.

Think about what’s HAPPENING right now all around us.

Prices are soaring.

Some say that the economy and tariffs are great,
but going to the grocery sort of proves otherwise.

People who speak languages other than English,

and have skin color other than white are being snatched off the street by unmarked, masked officers who now have the authority to deport them to countries far away, other than their own, and in some cases to places they have no memory of. Families are being separated in that.

There is a lot of HATRED and prejudice around us—and it is being endorsed and encouraged by many in power.

Those on the margins, those who are different, those in minority groups, are being slowed pushed aside.

The POOR are getting poorer.

Social safety nets for the poor, elderly and disabled are being dismantled. We hear lawmakers talk about people needing to work—but many of those receiving help are children, or totally disabled. So, how does that make sense?

Every group and organization is being affected by these changes, even churches.

Now churches that receive federal grants, even for something like security, can be forced to eliminate anything resembling DEI, and to help ICE.

If any of this is concerning, I hope we are LISTENING.

I hope we are going to vote when we can.

I hope we are praying, and writing our legislators, and speaking up.

But it's all **OVERWHELMING**.
And it's not just Diana's friend—it's most of us.

Did you know that the people who first heard the book of Hebrews were likely Jewish and Gentile Christians overwhelmed by persecution?

Some lost everything because of their faith, some were imprisoned.
They were losing hope.

And this sermon called Hebrews, comes with a message:

HOLD ONTO FAITH in Jesus Christ.

Even in the worst of times.

Because God is with us—always—and God is faithful.

So we should be faithful too.

And the writer of Hebrews, we don't know who he was, writes about faith as both a GIFT of God and a RESPONSE to God's faithfulness.

In this book, faith is not only **belief** (cognition), it is also **trust** (volition) and **faithfulness** (a way of life).

In other words, faith is ACTIVE.

It's not just an idea, or a good feeling.

It's action.

Faith matters.

I think that's what Diana Butler Bass was getting at with her friend.

Our faith matters, ESPECIALLY in times like these.

Faith might just be the very thing, or the only thing, ***keeping us going.***

So WHAT IS FAITH in Jesus Christ?

It is the ***assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.***

In other words, it is a solid hope, in a God we cannot see,

but we have conviction that our unseen God is working on our behalf.

Faith is God's GIFT AND OUR RESPONSE.

Faith is a ***'down payment'*** on our future with God.

Faith is not irrational, because it is rooted in God's Word.

But faith is a response to God's faithfulness—

an act of trust that leads to a life of trust.

Faith leads to faithfulness or it's NOT true faith.

Scot McKnight, *Connections*, Year C, Vol 3, pg. 226-7.

John Calvin, the father of Presbyterianism, wrote more about faith

in his Institutes of Christian Religion more than any other topic.

Calvin said that faith is '*evidence of God's benevolence toward us*'.

ABRAHAM is the quintessential MODEL of faith in God.

He left his home country for an unseen promised land in Canaan,

taking his family and all of his belongings with him.

He did all of that after hearing from God.

Imagine the response of his friends, neighbors, and family!

Imagine his wife Sarah!

You heard what?

You want us to pick up our lives at the age of 75, and go to unknown land?

All because God has spoken to you, and told you that our descendants would be great?

Did you mention to God that we are not young?

That we were unable to have children?

What are you talking about?

Abraham and Sarah's life was settled—before he decided to follow God's call.

And they had to make sacrifices for this leap of faith.

They lived their lives as nomads, in tents, traveling by faith—quite literally.

And when Abraham was 100 years old, and Sarah was 90,
three angels came to tell them that they would have a child.

Sarah just laughed.

So when Isaac was born, he was named for laughter.

Abraham is known as the FATHER OF FAITH

because he did what a lot of us would NOT do.

He gave up his life, to follow the living God.

Abraham and Sarah are models to us because they understood *faith as a*

JOURNEY---their whole lives were a journey to a promised land.

A land that they saw only from afar in their lifetime.

He is our model because faith WAS his life.

Faith in God guided his thoughts and actions, his beliefs and convictions.

We often we think of faith as an 'extra' ingredient in our lives,

Something that we do on the weekend, Sundays, or just when times are tough.

We do not always act as though faith is the very **FOUNDATION** of our lives—the thing that makes everything else work.

And we don't always see faith as a JOURNEY.

That's why Abraham's story is so compelling.

What if WE DID see faith that way?

What if we asked ourselves, where are we going?

Where is the promised land?

Is it only heaven?

Or also something here on earth?

***Do we think of ourselves as having TWO HOMES—
one here and one in eternity?***

And how do we envision the kingdom of God on earth?

Jesus certainly came to bring the kingdom of God—in both places—he taught his disciples to pray saying

thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven....

The question is: do we have faith like THAT?

When Diana Butler Bass met with her distressed friend, she said that one thing helping her was the ***Serenity Prayer***.

A prayer used often in AA or recovery groups.

***God grant me the SERENITY to accept the things I cannot change,
The COURAGE to change the things I can,
And the WISDOM to know the difference.***

Have you ever used that prayer in YOUR life?

It's really a ***Serenity-Courage-Wisdom*** prayer, according to Bass.

Because it's asking those three things of us—***Serenity, Courage and Wisdom***.

And couldn't we use more of each of those three things right now?

***That prayer was written in 1943 by American theologian Reinhold Niebuhr,
a professor at Union Theological Seminary.***

But did you know that he also had ***a longer version? With a communal focus?***

Listen to his prayer, the way that his daughter felt was closest to the intention:

***God, give us the grace to accept with serenity
the things that CANNOT be changed,
Courage to change the things that SHOULD be changed,***

And the wisdom to DISTINGUISH the one from the other.

Diana Butler Bass, The Cottage, “Serenity...Are You Kidding?”, August 2, 2025.

Isn't that powerful?

There are some things that *cannot* be changed,

But others that *should* be.

The question is—what are those things?

And will we have the wisdom to know the difference?

Accepting the things we cannot change doesn't mean giving up.

Or being passive or complicit.

It means recognizing that we are not God—we are individuals—with limited power.

And we are going to have to live with the state of the world right now, until it changes.

So we will have grief over what is unfair, unjust or wrong.

But there are plenty of things we CAN change—

we can give, we can volunteer, write letters, listen, vote, speak, work honestly, love extravagantly.

We cannot do everything,

but we can do some things, especially those things right in front of us.

And we can look to models of faith, to guide our lives.

I wonder—***who are YOUR heroes of faith?***

We certainly have a lot in the Bible—like Abraham, Moses, David, Paul, Peter, Mary, Mary Magdalene, Deborah, Judith.

But we also have people CLOSE to us.

And sometimes they are people whose faith is largely unseen—

It's in the background, behind the scenes.

My Aunt is a MODEL OF FAITH for me.

She grew up with a hard life. on a farm,

Lost two husbands,

Her son got in trouble.

Her grandson died.

She is last remaining member of her immediate family.

She has a host of medical problems.

But, she always has a smile, and a story of blessings.

She is always sharing what God is doing in her life.
 She cooks and sews for people in her church, keeps up with the prayer group,
 Makes phone calls and visits to the sick.
 I wonder, who are your faith heroes?
 What do you learn from them?

You know, we are ALL struggling—in more ways than one.

We all see what's happening around us, and we grieve.
 We all have pain—whether it's physical, emotional, or spiritual—
 or all of the above.
 We all have family problems, and unseen challenges.
 No one comes to this place without something hurting them.

So, how can we HOLD ONTO faith?

How will YOU hold onto faith?
 We have received the gift of faith from the Holy Spirit—it's inside us.

But it's a gift that we need to UNWRAP AND USE.

That's what it means to live by faith—
 like all the faithful saints before us.
 It means ***living like faith is the assurance of things hoped for and the conviction of things not seen.***

I want to close with Rosemerry Wahola Trommer's beautiful poem
 It's called "**Please**".

*If you are one who has practice
 Meeting the pain of the world, we need you.
 Right now we need you
 To **teach** us it is possible to swallow
 What is weighty and still be able to rise.
 We need you to **remind** us we can
 Be furious and scared and near feral
 Over injustice and still **thrill** at the taste
 Of a strawberry, ripe and sweet,
 Can still meet a stranger and shake
 Their hand, believing in their humanness.
 We need you to **show** us how
 We, too, can fall into the darkest,
 Unplumbed pit and learn there
 A **courage and beauty***

We could never learn from the light.

If you have drowned in sorrow

And still have somehow found

*A way to breathe, **please, lead us.***

You are the one with the crumbs

We need, the ones we will use to find

Our way back to the home of our hearts.

Diana Butler Bass, The Cottage, "Serenity...Are You Kidding?", August 2, 2025.

May we all choose to live by faith.

And for that calling, all God's people can say together, Amen.