

Read

Hebrews 11:1–12:12

Consider

This Sunday a four-week series of sermons begins based on Hebrews 11 and the first 12 verses of Hebrews 12. This series is called “The Faith Hall of Fame”. My suggestion is that you read from Hebrews 11:1–12:12 as preparation not only for this Sunday but for this entire February series. This series will focus on four of the “heroes” of biblical faith, Abraham, Moses, Rahab and Jesus. Jesus is called *the pioneer and perfecter of our faith* (Hebrews 12:2) and that sermon leads into the series for Lent and Holy Week, also based on Hebrews, Jesus is Greater. More about that in the Pathways newsletter for March 6.

Hebrews is in the Letters section of the New Testament and it might be true that copies of Hebrews circulated through the churches beginning in the second half of that first century A.D. Many scholars have guessed that Hebrews began its life as a sermon. Hebrews 11:32 sounds like the sort of thing a preacher would say—*And what more should I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon* etc. Perhaps if one is writing a letter there is concern about the amount of time taken, but time is much more likely to be a concern when people are being asked to listen to a sermon.

Hebrews 11 begins with a definition of faith. That definition is well known. *Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen* (Hebrews 11:1). This winter and early spring we are spending every Sunday talking about faith in one way or another. And I suppose some of you might say the preacher talks about faith every Sunday, and that would be true to one degree or another. The reason for this is given to us by the preacher of Hebrews. Look at Hebrews 11:6. *And without faith it is impossible to please God, for whoever would approach him must believe he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.* There is the reason why all those who are preaching in this series are anxious to talk about faith, for unless you are a person of faith, and unless your faith finds its focus in Jesus Christ, God’s Son and our Saviour, then it is impossible for you to please God. Yes, we want us to be people of faith; we want our faith to grow; we want to be those whose lives please God.

Our first faith hero is Abraham. He is the first great character of the Old Testament after the stories of Noah and the Tower of Babel. Abraham is the patriarch of God’s people and he is the most unlikely of people to be the ancestor of a great multitude. But we are told in Hebrews and in Genesis that Abraham responded to God with obedience. It is almost as if the preacher of Hebrews says to the congregation, “I can’t quite define what faith is in the life of Abraham, but I can easily tell you what Abraham did as a result of

faith. Abraham and his wife Sarah, while not perfect, are obedient to God. Doing as God asks is where we are going to start with our look at the Faith Hall of Fame. I hope you will be watching the YouTube presentation at 9:30 a.m. Sunday, February 6.

The Rev. Dr. Bill Norman

Pray

Almighty God, our loving Father, infinite in majesty,

I humbly ask you for myself and for all your servants everywhere, that you would give us a pure mind, perfect love, sincerity in conduct, purity in heart, strength in action, courage in distress, self-command in character. May our prayers ascend to your gracious ears and your loving benediction descend on us all, that we may in all things be protected by your care.

Remember all your people everywhere; give us all the grace of devotion to your will; fulfill our desires with good gifts; and crown us with your mercy. When we serve thee with faithful devotion, pardon our sins and correct us with fatherly tenderness. Grant that, being delivered from all adversity, and both here and eternally justified, we may praise you forever and ever, saying Holy, holy, holy; through Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, ever one God, without end. Amen.

Adapted from an 8th century liturgy

Diving Deeper

Can you think of a time when you demonstrated great faith in God? What was it that prompted this faith? Was there a particular promise of God that came true for you at that time?

Does Hebrews 11:1 strike you as an adequate or helpful definition of faith? What do you think are the *things hoped for* and the *things not seen*?

Read Hebrews 11:8–12. What are the examples given that the preacher of Hebrews says demonstrates Abraham's faith? How are these stories helpful to you in your world as you seek to live out your faith?

Our text describes Abraham and others as *strangers and foreigners on the earth*. Does that describe you? Perhaps in this different time and place those words should not describe

faithful people. What do you think? Do we also *desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one*?

How can we live closer **WITH GOD** in our lives?

How are we being **TRANSFORMED** to be more like Christ?

How is the Holy Spirit empowering us to imitate Christ in what we **DO** this week?