

“Have Faith?”

Genesis 12:1-4; Hebrews 10:34-11:3;
Matthew 19:23-30

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A number of years ago we were walking through the Sand Hills of Nebraska. We went up to a little house. As we got closer, we could see the house was overgrown. The trees and shrubs around it had almost covered it. We walked up to the door and had to force it a little to get it open. It was obvious that nobody had been there for years. We walked in and smelled the musty smell of that old place. We looked around and we saw a few things left behind. We saw a piece of furniture here, a stove over there, a few other items scattered around—the detritus of somebody’s life, perhaps. In the corner, there was a shoe—one shoe. As we were wondering who had lived there and why they left, that shoe, for me, was a question mark. Did the people leave quickly and forget that shoe? Had they already lost one of the shoes and left the other on purpose? Why had they left? What had life been like there? We had all kinds of questions about what had gone on and why they had left, and why they left behind what they had left behind.

If any of you have ever moved, you know what it’s like to think about what you are going to take with you and what you are going to leave behind. It’s a time when we think about thinning out a little bit, deciding what’s really important to take with us.

As I was thinking about Abraham being called to go on a journey by God, I recognized that he would have to decide what was going to go with him. I suspect there weren’t any moving vans back then—maybe a caravan. But he had to decide what was going to go with him, and there were some things he simply couldn’t take. He couldn’t take a place of familiarity with him. He had to leave that place behind. He couldn’t take all the friends he had made there, the people he knew. He had to leave them behind. He was going to places unknown and leaving behind the known. He had to do that if he was going to follow God and go on the journey that God had asked him to go on. It may not even have been clear where he was headed at that point, but he was off on a journey.

I think in many ways it is the journey we are all on. God calls us into a journey, a journey through life. It’s a journey that we get to share together at times, but a journey on which we can begin to accumulate stuff. We can begin to accumulate patterns of life, ways of thinking. We can begin to accumulate our familiarity with a place. Some of that can be good. The question, it seems, that Jesus is addressing is how easy it is for our accumulation of all kinds of stuff to get in the

way of our entry into the Kingdom of God. All that stuff, all the ways we might want things to be—the question always comes to me: what do I need to leave behind?

Peter comes to Jesus and says, “Look, we have left a lot behind.” Peter was a fisherman and he had left the nets behind. It was his form of sustenance. As we’ve followed along with Peter through the past few weeks, we thought maybe he left behind the dream that maybe one day he would put up his rabbi diploma. He wanted to put that on his wall and be that person, but maybe he had to set that aside as well. You can almost hear that in his question to Jesus: What will we have?

I was kind of struck by that. I have always paid attention to “Look, Jesus, we have let all this go.” But then the question is “What will we have?” What kind of question is that? It feels to me like it’s a question of “OK, Jesus, I’ve let this all go, but I don’t know where we’re going.” It’s interesting the way Jesus responds. He says, “Here’s where we are going.” But it’s a promise. He’s not saying “Here’s what you have,” but “Here’s what you will have. Here’s where we’re headed.” That takes some trust, some faith. What Jesus, I think, is responding to Peter with is “You have to exercise a little faith, and here’s where we’re going.”

We know how to do that. We do that all the time, in some ways. Anybody who has grown up around here knows that we go to school. Why do we go to school? It’s not always because we want to. I would guess that most of us, somewhere along the line, wonder “Why in the world am I here?” Well, we know why we’re there. Generally it is because our parents told us we had to be there, or somebody else told us we had to be there, or society tells us that if you actually make it through you’ll do better in life. You’ve got that promise. You’ve got that sense of the way forward. But in the middle of it, we have to have that faith. We have to trust that it’s going to take us there. So part of the question is, what do we trust? How do we find our way?

Jesus is telling Peter “I’ll lead you, but you have to follow. You may not be able to see it now.” If you have seen a compass, you know that it has a little arrow inside that seems to turn all on its own. No matter which way I turn the outside, the arrow inside keeps pointing the same direction. I can exert force on the outside, but why doesn’t that arrow change? It has something to do with magnetism. There are lines of force to which this arrow responds. I don’t feel it. I don’t see those lines of magnetism, and yet I know they are there because I see the arrow. I see it change.

There are things unseen, lines of force, on our lives. You might say there are spiritual lines of force as well. I don’t want to go too far with this analogy, but

there are ways we can't see, especially on our own. We can't see magnetism. I generally can't see the future. I need a way forward. We have to trust something. We trust our parents when they tell us that going to school is a way forward. We trust society to tell us sometimes which way is the way forward. Jesus is telling Peter, "You have to trust me to know the way forward." You have to have an assurance of things hoped for and a confidence in things unseen.

Faith, trust. Jesus is in some ways our compass, the one who helps us find a way where we can't see the way. When we have the assurance in things hoped for and confidence in things unseen, we have faith that he knows the way and can guide us through the grace and goodness of God.

Have you seen that commercial, "Got Milk?" We know we need to have something to go along with other things. I think what Jesus is asking Peter is "Have you got faith? You'll need it." Think about what he says at the very end. He says, "Because the first shall be last and the last shall be first." It's an interesting thing. Things that society thinks are so important are going to seem pretty insignificant. We may need to leave some of those "important" things behind. We may experience feeling pretty insignificant, yet in the "insignificance" we are likely to encounter the wonder of what God has given, the wonder and grace of God. It doesn't necessarily come from worldly greatness, but from a place of humble insignificance in the eyes of the world. I think that's a hard place to go, to let myself be insignificant to the world, and to follow Christ. To do that requires one to have the assurance of things hoped for and the confidence in things unseen, and to put that trust in the One who *can* guide us. Amen.

Gracious God, we are thankful that you have come into our lives in a way that helps us recognize that we have things that we are holding onto that aren't helpful. There are some things that we need to leave behind, let go of, so that we can follow you. We recognize that we can't always see exactly where we are going, but we can follow Christ. And as we have faith—an assurance in things hoped for and confidence in things unseen—that Christ can lead us through, we have that promise that we will know the wonder of your grace and life everlasting. Lord, thank you. Instill in us that assurance, that confidence, that faith. Through Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.