

Longing for Home©

Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-19

August 11, 2013

Dr. Sharlyn DeHaven Gates

What is faith to you? How would you define it? To the author of Hebrews it is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

I often say, when talking about our hope in Christ that this hope is something much more than the little things we hope for in our daily lives: I hope I don't make a mistake on that test; I hope I don't trip and fall; I hope the scales go down and not up ...

This hope we talk about in our Christian life is more in tune with what the author of Hebrews is writing, I think. It is an assurance, even though we can't see it or prove it, we somehow know it is true and believe that what we hope for is really there.

We can't see or prove that God created the universe and all that is in it. Scientists have data that causes them to claim that they have proof of how creation came about and how life has evolved. But does that mean our faith in God as Creator goes down the drain? Not to me!

However it turns out that creation happened, I have faith – a belief – that God, the Creator was the ultimate cause of it all. I have a hope, that I somehow feel assured is true, in a God I cannot see.

The Hebrew writer points to others in history who had this kind of faith. Abraham and Sara of the Old Testament are good examples.

Abram was the son of Terah, a descendant of Noah. Abram married Sarai and lived in the land of Haran where Terah had moved his family from the land of Ur.

But one day, Abram heard the voice of the Lord telling him to pack up and move his wife and his nephew away from his family and the home he knew to go to a land he did not know.

And the Lord told him he would make him the father of many descendants, which might seem like a joke to many because Abram and Sarai were up there in years and had never been able to have children.

So old Abram and almost as old Sarai had this faith in something they could not see or completely understand. They heard the call to make this journey to the unknown and believed and they went.

And God did give them many descendants. Although they both were around 100 years old, Abram and Sarai had a child, who had many children and many descendants.

And for the new life, the life of faith, God renamed them Abraham and Sara. We today, as believers, are a part of that legacy – that heritage of faith.

Have you ever made a move to another place believing God wanted you to do it? This is a journey that is not based on a promotion for a job, although your work could be a factor. This is more of a deep longing and a strong sense of the Spirit leading; a belief that there is something – SOMETHING – that is waiting for you.

Many of you met our friend from Australia – Gary Wallis. When Gary and his wife, Lynn were in Nashville around 2002 for a big international event the Upper Room Ministries was holding, they shared with me after one of the worship services that they both had a belief that God was calling them to go on an unknown journey to serve in some way that was different than what they were doing at the time.

Gary and Lynn did not know what that journey was or where it would lead or who it would be with but they had faith that God had a journey – a plan – for them.

For eight years they sought to find what it was they were to do. They trained for mission work, they looked at and prayed over different possibilities until finally they were offered the opportunity to go to India and serve as house parents for girls who were from very impoverished families.

And so they went and lived there among them, eating and living as they lived – which was quite different than the life they knew in Brisbane. They were there for eight months until they were called back home but the difference they made there continues to exist.

They have built on to the school and provided many necessities, including donations of money from many people. The girls who were first there are getting college degrees and finding good jobs and more young girls are coming to the school and looking forward to a brighter, more hopeful future.

Lynn died last year – her battle with cancer finally over. And while she did not see the final outcome of their journey to India, she believed, she had faith. Gary continues to go twice a year and take mission teams to work – it is a journey I am praying about making for a couple of weeks next year.

Out of faith and hope that God truly was leading them to India, they went, and the love of God is continuing to be at work through that act of faith.

I have so many examples of that kind of faith with my missionary friends or even my pastor friends who hear the call to serve and, without knowing exactly how it will be, they trust that God is leading. In fact that is exactly how I have experienced the call to go where I sense God leading and the result of that journey has led me here.

So, those are some illustrations of how I see faith. But how do you experience faith? What is the deep longing in your soul? How do you hear the voice of the Lord calling you? And how have you acted on taking those steps in the journey?

I would suggest that the ministries of the church, the mission opportunities we have experienced are all a part of that faith journey. Someone had a sense of the call of God to start something that would end up being “In the Beginning Baby Pantry that would serve many families who are struggling within our community.”

Someone had a sense of call to begin having bake sales to help provide a boiler in this church building. Why? Is that a mission? You’d better believe it is! Because if we had no way to keep warm, how would we carry on with the work we do here that then sends us out of here to serve God? It’s also an act of faith that says we believe Holly Presbyterian Church will be around serving the Lord for years to come.

Every one of you have taken a part in serving in some way that may start here but ends up multiplying out there in the world. Shaun and Michele heard the call that meant doing something different – stepping outside of their normal lives and doing something that would take a great deal of time outside of what they already do.

Shaun, while working at his regular job, also began taking classes so he could serve the church. Michele had to make sacrifices because Shaun would not be as available.

You may be wondering what the title of this sermon has to do with any of the things I’ve been talking about. But, I think it all comes down to our longing for home, don’t you?

Our Hebrew writer says, about all the ancestors of faith: “¹³All 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, ¹⁴for people who speak in this way make it clear that they are seeking a homeland.

¹⁵If they had been thinking of the land that they had left behind they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; indeed, he has prepared a city for them.”

Isn’t it true that, while most of us love our home here on earth, we do long for that final home? We who are believers have a faith in something that is our final home – the home where there is peace and unending joy in the presence and glory of the Lord who is leading us on this journey of faith and is with us every step of the way.

For me, a minister who has the honor of serving families at the time of the death of a loved one, the hope that the text in Hebrews is talking about is this kind of hope.

It is an assurance that the hope we have is true. It is the hope and assurance that things will be okay, even when life seems hopeless at the moment.

It is a hope that what we believe in Christ's death and resurrection is true. A hope that the promise of life after death is true. A hope that we will be reunited with our loved ones is true. A hope that nothing can separate us from God's love is true.

It's not something we actually can see yet, but I believe it and I know so many others do to. I believe that the Holy Spirit gives us this great gift of faith – a faith that is the assurance of things hoped for; the conviction of things not seen.

I believe that all of God's people, although we love our life God has given us here, have a built in, natural longing for home – our God home, our final home. Until then, all that we do and all we experience is part of that journey that God is leading us on as we make our way there.

If we pause each night to think about where our journey has led us in that day we might begin to see some amazing signs that God is using us along the way and that our God is also preparing us for that great home with Him.

May all our days be filled with faith and hope – the hope that is an assurance that what we believe will come about. The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob continues to call His people on the journey towards our heavenly home. May you keep the faith and live in the hope.

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

© Copyright 2013. All Rights Reserved.