

**FAITH IS THE FOUNDATION**  
**A Sermon On Hebrews 11:1-19 and Matthew 9:18-26**  
**October 4, 2009**  
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*Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.*

As we begin a four week emphasis on Christian stewardship I want you to know how important your faithfulness and generosity have been in this year of economic crisis. In spite of the economy and the uncertainty it has thrust upon all of us your giving of time, talent and treasure has allowed this congregation to remain strong. In a year when seven major congregations of the Detroit Annual Conference declared early on that they will not pay 100% of their apportionments, this church has remained current with its apportionment contributions and is on track to pay its apportionments in full once again. We have increased our giving to missions. We are on track to raise an additional \$5,000 for the Heifer Project in honor of our 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary. We have completed and dedicated a wonderful renovation of our parking lot and building entrance. The beauty of our facility is now an encouragement to the entire neighborhood. Kid's Discovery Network was fully funded once again and the outreach to our neighborhood continues.

All of that has to do with treasure. Consider as well your generosity when it comes to time and talent. The *Tree of Service* is filled with hundreds of leaves representing hundreds of ways you are giving of your time and talent. Dozens of people have worked countless hours making this year of celebration one to remember for years to come. Janet Curtiss has overseen the creation of an excellent keepsake book chronicling the history of our church. A spontaneous spirit of adventure has taken hold

and brought unexpected events such as the upcoming concert featuring The Four Freshmen and Ken Medema's concert here in May.

I lift up all of this as a way of saying that as we begin the study of Christian stewardship we do so from a position of strength. The items I have listed are made possible because of your commitment to Jesus Christ and the ministries of this church. We focus on stewardship because we want to continue to grow in all aspect of the Christian life. We want to continue the progress we have made. Let us begin.

Stewardship is a *faith*/discipleship issue. You know by now that I understand faith as a radical trust in God. Faith is living in the confidence that God will sustain us through whatever trials life may send our way. This congregation will be in ministry to the extent that our *faith* allows it. I have never known a congregation that did not support whatever they were convinced God had called them to. But I have known congregations that had grown so vague regarding their *faith* that they no longer saw themselves as agents of the divine. These are always congregations in trouble. They are in trouble because they have lost sight of who and whose they are. Their expectations are low and their sense of the obstacles in the way is acute. When the *faith* of a congregation is strong the church possesses a sense of purpose and drive. People are invested in the completion of the mission of the church. Expectations are high and obstacles are recognized and dispensed with quickly.

This is my vision for this congregation – that together we should build a church of people with a keen sense of being God's agents in this time and space; that we should be bound together by our deep emotional and spiritual investment in our efforts. That we should live with high expectations and the confidence that when God has called us to a

task God will also provide, through us, what is necessary to see the task to completion. If we can do this together and with God's help we will find that money and other resources no longer pose a problem. The real issue has never been money the real issue has always been *faith* and discipleship.

I like the way Hebrews 11 begins in the NRSV translation. *Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.* The NIV Bible translates the Greek as *Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.* I object to this translation. *Faith* is not the same thing as certainty. In fact I believe it is a quest for a false certainty that negates *faith*. *Faith* has much more to do with confidence in things that cannot be seen than it does with certainty. God calls us to a life of confidence not a life of certainty.

But Christianity has been presented as a life where there is certainty. This is very attractive to those who find their understanding of the world beginning to fall apart. Certainty has to do with knowing exactly what is right and what is wrong, who is in and who is out, who is good and who is bad, what to do and what not to do. But I find precious little certainty in life. I have my convictions and my opinions and I must act according to my best convictions but there is no certainty that I alone am right. Take this church for example. I am convinced that our future is bright and I am willing to bear considerable personal risk on that bright future. So are many of you. You have demonstrated that in many ways. But there is no guarantee in this endeavor. We may end up where we all hope and want to be or we may not. We may end up in some better place we have never foreseen or we might fail all together. There is no certainty. But there is confidence and assurance. I have confidence and assurance that God is with us in

this endeavor and that it is worth my full investment. I live with the conviction that a magnificent Christian congregation was established in this church 175 years ago and continues through this day and on into the future.

*Faith* as confidence requires discipline. *Faith* as certainty requires no discipline. What discipline is required when no questions or doubts are allowed? Scripture tells us that our biblical ancestors allowed ample room for doubt and misdirection and confusion. The story of Abraham and Sarah makes that abundantly clear. *Faith* disciplines were given as a way to see us through the doubts and the fears and the questioning and keep us on God's track. Regular worship, meditation, prayer, fasting, hospitality, simplicity, study and generous living have been the tools of serious Christians for centuries as we seek to set our hearts and minds on God's agenda and purpose. These practices are intended to help us remain clear about who we are.

This is about growing as Christian disciples and remembering who we are. This is about learning to live with confidence in an uncertain world and putting God's agenda before our own. Faith is the foundation of generous living. This is about giving ourselves over to something greater than ourselves for the sake of fulfilling God's perfect vision for the world. There are no guarantees. But whatever way it turns out, God will love us through it all.

THANKS BE TO GOD.

### Hebrews 11:1 - 19 (NRSV)

<sup>1</sup>Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. <sup>2</sup>Indeed, by faith<sup>o</sup> our ancestors received approval. <sup>3</sup>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.<sup>o</sup> <sup>4</sup>By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable<sup>o</sup> sacrifice than Cain's. Through this he received approval as righteous, God himself giving approval to his gifts; he died, but through his faith<sup>o</sup> he still speaks. <sup>5</sup>By faith Enoch was taken so that he did not experience death; and "he was not found, because God had taken him." For it was attested before he was taken away that "he had pleased God."

<sup>6</sup>And without faith it is impossible to please God, for whoever would approach him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him. <sup>7</sup>By faith Noah, warned by God about events as yet unseen, respected the warning and built an ark to save his household; by this he condemned the world and became an heir to the righteousness that is in accordance with faith. <sup>8</sup>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. <sup>9</sup>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. <sup>10</sup>For he looked forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. <sup>11</sup>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.<sup>o</sup> <sup>12</sup>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." <sup>13</sup>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, <sup>14</sup>for people who speak in this way make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. <sup>15</sup>If they had been thinking of the land that they had left behind, they would have had opportunity to return. <sup>16</sup>But 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. <sup>17</sup>By faith Abraham, when put to the test, offered up Isaac. He who had received the promises was ready to offer up his only son, <sup>18</sup>of whom he had been told, "It is through Isaac that descendants shall be named for you." <sup>19</sup>He considered the fact that God is able even to raise someone from the dead—and figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.

### Matthew 9:18 - 26 (NRSV)

<sup>18</sup>While he was saying these things to them, suddenly a leader of the synagogue<sup>o</sup> came in and knelt before him, saying, "My daughter has just died; but come and lay your hand on her, and she will live." <sup>19</sup>And Jesus got up and followed him, with his disciples. <sup>20</sup>Then suddenly a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years came up behind him and touched the fringe of his

cloak, <sup>21</sup>for she said to herself, "If I only touch his cloak, I will be made well."  
<sup>22</sup>Jesus turned, and seeing her he said, "Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well." And instantly the woman was made well. <sup>23</sup>When Jesus came to the leader's house and saw the flute players and the crowd making a commotion, <sup>24</sup>he said, "Go away; for the girl is not dead but sleeping." And they laughed at him. <sup>25</sup>But when the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took her by the hand, and the girl got up. <sup>26</sup>And the report of this spread throughout that district.