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Pentecost 12 –August 28, 2022

“Following in the Footsteps of the Faithful”

Read: Hebrews 11: 1 – 16 / Memorize:

We’re in the great faith chapter of Hebrews. That word, faith, is central to our lives as followers of Jesus Christ. The Bible talks about it a lot. By faith, Noah built an ark. By faith, Abraham fathered a son. By faith, a young monk named Martin Luther stood up to the Roman Church, proclaiming that it was the grace of God through faith that saves.

By faith, a bunch of people from Canandaigua and its environs, were led to begin a Lutheran Church in 1960. We are the inheritors of their faith, and the hope that we would continue that pattern now, for those to come. That was the issue that powered our “For Generations to Come – Go! Campaign.” We put before you a vision that called us to trust that God would provide all we needed to step out into the future He was preparing for us.

As in all adventures in faith, I can remember we wondered what God would do through us. Would the people of Good Shepherd rise up and support the vision that was being cast, or not? Would we look beyond ourselves to the future that God had in store for the generations to come, or not?

According to the writer of Hebrews, there are two or three things about faith that you and I ought to know. Faith is the ability to see. It is the set of eyes through which we see the world; a set of glasses through which we perceive the world.

Faith is a way of seeing. A kid, who was called in from play for dinner, is asked by his mother to wash his hands before coming to the dinner table. Disgusted by the whole thing, the boy laments, “Germs and Jesus, germs and Jesus, that’s all I ever hear about in this house and I’ve never seen either one of them.”

For some, faith is invisible and impossible. Others find faith, especially when you add the word blind to it, a far-out idea. It’s not blind faith we’re asking of you, but

trust in the vision of God. Faith is seeing fully. Sometimes, when we talk about faith it may seem it's an impossible dream or wishful thinking.

What comes to my mind is what the writer of Hebrews said about 20 centuries ago "Faith is being sure of what you hope for and being certain of what you do not see." By faith, you board an airplane. By faith, you drive a car. By faith, you start a family. Ultimately, life is lived by faith.

While some say, "Show me and I will believe." We hear God saying, "Believe in me and I will show you." God laid out a vision for us and we responded with our time, talents and treasure to bring it into fruition. It seemed almost impossible but we believed and trusted that God would provide and that's exactly what He did!

While some see things as they are and ask why, the faithful dream of things that never were and ask why not. That is the story of the faithful. Faith is the ability to see. It is a set of eyes through which we see the world, but faith is also something more.

Faith is not only the eyes to see, but the courage to act on what we see. There's an old story about a tightrope walker, Charles Blondin, who stretched a cable across Niagara Falls. He walked the tightrope across the rushing, cascading waters that thundered underneath and arrived to the applause of a crowd. Then, he rode a bike across, followed by doing it blindfolded.

For his grand finale he took a wheelbarrow and, playing to the crowd said, "Do you think I can push this wheelbarrow across Niagara Falls?" The crowd responded with thundering yes's to which he replied, "Well, which one of you will volunteer to ride in the wheelbarrow?" One of the endings for this story says that no one came forward. Faith calls us to act on our belief.

By faith, Abel offered, Enoch walked, Noah built and Abraham went out, not knowing where he was going, but certain he was following the Lord. You see, faith has the ability to see, but it also has the courage to act on it.

The church is always built on the faith of those who came before. At first there were names like Yarger, Pelton, Pittenger and a whole bunch of others. Interestingly enough, some remain in a form. Gayle Hendershot was a Yarger, along with her sister, Linda Utter. Daphne Figenscher, daughter of David and Reilly, is the fifth generation of Charlie and Helen Pelton's family, who were members

here from the very beginning. Dave Pittenger, along with his deceased parents, Francis and Bunny, were also charter members.

When I was called as pastor there were serious questions if Good Shepherd would survive as a congregation. Having said that, I should make the disclaimer that it was not because I was called as the pastor. There had been a split in the congregation and there was a danger of its dissolution.

God brought us through that time and helped us to come to this time. We are a strong, faithful congregation, which gathers around Word and Sacrament in order to fulfill the commission of Jesus to make disciples.

The various teams in our congregation plan out ways in which we can touch the lives of people and help share the love of Jesus Christ with them. Sometimes they're big, like helping to build a house. At other times, they might seem **easy**, only to find that it takes a lot of time and talent to accomplish it.

Don Hendershot spent many hard, sweaty days, along with Gayle, preparing the garden plot and more days caring for it this summer. He's seeing the fruit of his vision as we share vegetables with our neighbors, giving us another way to connect with them and letting them see Good Shepherd as a good neighbor.

Faith is the determination to endure. Hebrews 11: 13 says: "All these people died still believing what God had promised them. They did not receive what was promised, but they saw it all from a distance and welcomed it." I believe that is one of the most powerful statements of the New Testament. It is not the reception of things, but the promise and the looking forward to it, which is vital to the life and faith of the church.

Noted theologian Reinhold Niebuhr said, "Nothing worth doing is completed in one lifetime, therefore we must be saved by hope. Nothing true or beautiful makes complete sense in any context of history, therefore we must be saved by faith. Nothing we do, no matter how virtuous, can be accomplished alone, therefore, we are saved by love."

What we do and why we do it is not meant to make Good Shepherd look good. What we do and why we do it, is to hold up Jesus as the Savior of the world, who loves us enough to get us into heaven, but also creates a life worth living here. Our

faith can never just be about getting into heaven, but about living a life of significance for Jesus.

For Christians, significance is not so much a matter of fame as faithfulness. We need to ask ourselves each day, are we being faithful to God's calling? We talk about it as "Sharing Christ, Changing Lives!" So how are we seeking to accomplish that? We are seeking to live as everyday disciples. We're not just followers of Jesus Christ on Sunday; then go back to our other lives Monday – Saturday. We are the Body of Christ, gathered under Word and Sacrament, which has been called by God to serve.

Whom are we serving? We serve our local communities. Our people are spread out through several counties, yet they come to Good Shepherd. They come because the Word of God is taught, the Sacraments are celebrated and we have a vision to touch the lives of people who don't know Jesus. They come because they have found a spiritual home and friendships here. We serve those beyond our local communities, and even county, through partnerships.

It is our intention that "For Generations to Come" there will still be a Good Shepherd, where Jesus is worshipped as Lord and Savior. We change so that, as people come to Good Shepherd, they will find a warm and welcoming community that meets their needs, so they can help meet others' needs now, and in years to come. To accomplish that vision we need to be faithful. Faithful to Jesus, faithful to the mission He has given us, faithful to each other, and faithful to the communities that we live in and serve.

God has planted us here to be the seed that enables faith to grow. We are pilgrims, on a journey, a long and winding road. We are surrounded by that great crowd of witnesses who have gone before us. They line the way as we move forward. As we go forward with hope that those who come will remember our faithfulness and build on it, just as we have done. That can only happen as we live our lives for Jesus and call others to do the same!

Here's your question: How and where is God calling you to share your hope and faith?