

Come to Him in Faith

August 12, 2007

(Pentecost 11 - Year C)

Hebrews 11: 1-16

St. Alban's Episcopal Church, Waco, Texas

It is so good to be back here at St. Alban's today.

I have had a wonderful summer of traveling, with trips to Houston, Kentucky, Los Angeles, Camp Allen and Michigan.

Plus, it has been good to just relax in the swimming pool.

I know that I have had some beneficial time away, because I was eager to get back here to Waco and to St. Alban's this week.

We heard a reading this morning from the Letter to the Hebrews.

The Letter to the Hebrews sounds very much like a sermon.

And in the 11th chapter that we read from today, the preacher of Hebrews speaks to us about the subject of faith.

The preacher of Hebrews writes:

“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”

The preacher of Hebrews then goes on to illustrate the meaning of faith, using examples of real people from the Old Testament.

By faith, Abel offers a sacrifice to God.

By faith, Enoch is taken up into heaven.

By faith, Noah builds an ark while it's still sunny outside.

By faith, Abraham leaves his homeland in Ur.

By faith, Sarah has a baby when she is an old woman.

By faith, each of these people had hope in a new future.

By faith, each of these people trusted in a God whom they could not see.

If you notice carefully, the belief systems of each of these people is not mentioned.

The preacher of the book of Hebrews does *not* say:

Because Noah believed every word of the Nicene Creed, he built the ark.

The preacher of the book of Hebrews does *not* say:

Because Abraham believed in the doctrine of atonement, his children were as numerous as the stars and the grains of sand on the

seashore.

No, it was by faith, by trust in God, that Noah built the ark.
It was by faith, by trust in God, that Sarah had a baby.

Faith is not just about having right beliefs.
Faith is about trust and hope and a vision for a new future.

One of the good things about raising our sons in the context of a clergy family is that our children have a tangible reality of living a life dependent on faith.

I can remember when Scott and John were much littler,
And when Susan and I were explaining to them the process of us moving away from Houston to go to Virginia to seminary.

We told them:

“Now Dad is going to quit his job, and Mom will leave her teaching job.
But, Mom is going to find a new teaching job in Virginia.
Then, Dad will go to school for 3 years.
And, Dad will intern at a church.
Then, Dad will graduate from seminary.
Then, he will become a priest.”

At the conclusion of all that, our son, John, asked:

“But, where will we go after all that?”

And our other son, Scott, piped up and replied:

“We’ll go wherever God tells us to go next.”

The preacher in the Book of Hebrews says:

“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.”

Faith is not just about having right beliefs.

Faith is about going wherever God tells us to go next.

Faith is about trust and hope and a vision for a new future.

We are celebrating two baptisms this morning {at the 10 o’clock service}.

We are baptizing John Corey, a 3 month old baby.

And we are baptizing Morgan Peterson, a 10 year old girl.

One of my favorite parts of the liturgy for Holy Baptism is during the Thanksgiving over the Water.

After I have recounted the various ways in which water has played a part in our salvation history, I say this:

“Therefore, in joyful obedience to your Son, we bring into his fellowship those who come to him in faith, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”

We bring into his fellowship those who come to him *in faith*.

This is why, in the Episcopal Church, we baptize adults and children and infants.

This is why we baptize those who can speak for themselves and those who can't.

This is why we baptize those who are held in our arms and those who need a footstool to reach up to the font.

We baptize *all* who come to God *in faith*.

After we baptize John and Morgan today, I have no idea what they will grow up to be like or who they will become.

I have no idea whether they are going to be liberal or conservative or moderate.

I have no idea what they will believe or where their spiritual journey will take them.

Yet, by faith, I trust and hope that they will be Christ's own forever.

By faith, I trust and hope that John and Morgan will live into their Baptismal Covenant and change the world into a more loving place.

Faith is not just about having right beliefs.

Faith is about baptizing all who come to God.

Faith is about trust and hope and a vision for a new future.

And, faith is an attitude that always looks forward, and never looks back. The preacher of the Book of Hebrews says this about Abraham and Sarah and Isaac and Jacob:

“All of these died in faith without having received the promises, but from a distance they saw and greeted them...for they [were]

seeking a homeland.

If they had been thinking of the land that they had left behind, they would have had an opportunity to return.

But, as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one.”

People of faith do not look back at the land they left behind.

People of faith look forward, to a new country, to a new homeland.

People of faith trust and hope and have a vision for a new future.

You might have come into this church today with similar challenges to the Old Testament heroes mentioned in the Book of Hebrews.

Like Abel, you and your brother might not be getting along or even speaking to each other.

Like Noah, maybe you are struggling to build an ark, or maybe struggling with credit card debt or struggling in your job or in your marriage.

Like Abraham, maybe God is pushing you to go on a journey, but you have no idea where you are going.

Like all the heroes of faith, you might not ever reach your desired destination while you are on this earth,

But the faith journey will take us to a *better* country, a heavenly country.

For, faith is going wherever God tells us to go next.

Faith is baptizing all who come to God.

Faith is an attitude that looks forward, not backward, to a new and better homeland.

Therefore, in joyful obedience to God’s Son, we bring into his fellowship those who journey with us to that heavenly country.

In joyful obedience to God’s Son, we bring into his fellowship those who come to him... in faith.

AMEN.