

Fifth Sunday in Trinity: Homily

First Lesson: Genesis 17:1-18

17 And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the Lord appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect.

2 And I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly.

3 And Abram fell on his face: and God talked with him, saying,

4 As for me, behold, my covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations.

5 Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made thee.

6 And I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee.

7 And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee.

8 And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.

9 And God said unto Abraham, Thou shalt keep my covenant therefore, thou, and thy seed after thee in their generations.

10 This is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; Every man child among you shall be circumcised.

11 And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you.

12 And he that is eight days old shall be circumcised among you, every man child in your generations, he that is born in the house, or bought with money of any stranger, which is not of thy seed.

13 He that is born in thy house, and he that is bought with thy money, must needs be circumcised: and my covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant.

14 And the uncircumcised man child whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people; he hath broken my covenant.

15 And God said unto Abraham, As for Sarai thy wife, thou shalt not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall her name be.

16 And I will bless her, and give thee a son also of her: yea, I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of people shall be of her.

¹⁷ Then Abraham fell upon his face, and laughed, and said in his heart, Shall a child be born unto him that is an hundred years old? and shall Sarah, that is ninety years old, bear?

¹⁸ And Abraham said unto God, O that Ishmael might live before thee!

Second Lesson: Hebrews 11:1-16

11 Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

² For by it the elders obtained a good report.

³ Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.

⁴ By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh.

⁵ By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God.

⁶ But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.

⁷ By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.

⁸ By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went.

⁹ By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise:

¹⁰ For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

¹¹ Through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised.

¹² Therefore sprang there even of one, and him as good as dead, so many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the sea shore innumerable.

¹³ These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

¹⁴ For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country.

¹⁵ And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned.

¹⁶ But now they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city.

Introduction

There is a scene in one of my favorite movies that has always resonated with me, and especially after reading our second lesson this morning. In the movie *Good Will Hunting* there is a conversation that occurs between the character Sean, played by the brilliant Robin Williams, and Will who is played by Matt Damon. For those of you who are not familiar with the movie, it is about a young genius who works at an Ivy League school as a janitor. He draws the attention of the professors when he solves a difficult and complex math problem on a hallway black board. Despite his rough upbringing and negative influences, they see the potential in Will and ask him to seek counseling with Sean. In one scene, Sean pushes past the tough guy act and demonstrates to Will how knowledge, or what we read in books, is often not enough to truly understand something. You can be called a genius, and still not know something.

Sean says to him, "If I asked you about art, you'd probably give me the skinny on every art book ever written. Michelangelo, you know a lot about him. Life's work, political aspirations, the whole works, right? But I'll bet you can't tell me what it smells like in the Sistine Chapel. You've never actually stood there and looked up at that beautiful ceiling and sought to understand it. I'd ask you about love, you'd probably quote me a sonnet. But you've never looked at a woman and been totally vulnerable. Known someone that could level you with her eyes, feeling like God put an angel on earth just for you. I'd ask you about war, you'd probably throw Shakespeare at me, right, "once more unto the breach dear friends." But you've never been near one. You never saw the brutality of combat firsthand. You don't know about real loss, 'cause it only occurs when you've loved something more than you love yourself."

Body

(Hebrews 11:1-2) Here we learn what faith is, that it is the product of things hoped and desired and manifests in ways not seen by human eyes)

Our second lesson from the Epistle to the Hebrews starts with the sentence, "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." Faith, like love, war, and art, can be researched and the concept learned in a factual manner. However, it is when we move past what we can see with our eyes and lift up our hearts, souls and minds to the love of God and our role in His kingdom, that we begin to understand the true essence of what faith is. The "hoped for" things we are sure of, are things God has promised. The "unseen things" we are convinced of, are things God has revealed. So, in faith one believes what God has revealed and trusts what God has promised.

(Hebrews 11:3-16) The author takes us on a tour of the "Faith Hall of Fame" and shows us how each Old Testament hero of faith defined and demonstrated faith.

The author of Hebrews then takes us on a tour through the Old Testament heroes of faith and discusses what they had to endure and how they demonstrated faith in God. The concept of faith, and its importance, is beautifully explored and discussed. It is also a nice refresher of the Old

Testament and the many wonderful and inspiring accounts one will encounter in the pages. We hear of the faith of Able, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, and Sara. We remember the trials, promises fulfilled by God, and how faith becomes the foundation of Christian life. This chapter helps us understand what faith is by looking at several key elements.

Believing in God's Existence. Faith is believing in an all omnipotent, omnipresent and everlasting God. When one believes and loves God with all their heart, soul and mind (Matt. 22:37) they understand that God is the reality they hope for, even when they can't see God directly.

Confidence and Assurance. Faith is trusting that the Bible is the inerrant Word of God and what it promises we can believe and count on. Faith is being sure of the things we hope for and knowing that God is present in our lives, even if we cannot physically see Him. It is the inner conviction, the core belief that God's commandments and promises are trustworthy and real. It is knowing that God's ways are not ours and trusting that He will be there for us.

We seek God's Rewards. Faith recognizes that God rewards those who diligently seek Him. The Old Testament is filled with example after example of God telling the people how to live, how to worship Him and what not to do. Those who obeyed saw their lives enriched and those who defied God endured the results. It isn't just about believing in God; we must actively seek to have a relationship with Him and honor Him in all we do.

Living Authentically and in Accordance with God's Word. All of the examples in our lesson from the Epistle to the Hebrews shows how the people of God faced adversity and life trials, yet never stopped trusting in God to deliver them. Their faith wasn't based on what was happening in the world around them but on deep commitment, and trust, in God to bring them out whole and restored.

Faith is foundational to the Christian life. You cannot become a Christian without saving faith. You cannot live as a Christian without persevering faith, and you cannot grow as a Christian unless you are growing in faith. Faith is foundational to the Christian life. Faith is indeed "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." Faith keeps your hope alive, knowing that God is with you through all the trials and difficulties in your life. The stronger your faith, the stronger your hope and trust is in God. This trust is rooted in belief, confidence in God's real presence, and a willingness to surrender and seek Him with all of our heart and soul. When things get rough or we experience challenging circumstances, we can weather the storm knowing that God is with us. "For we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose" (Rom. 8:28)

Action

So how do we as Christians learn to have faith and to trust in God? Hebrews 11:6 tells us "But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." In our world today there are many forces that want you to not believe in God, not trust in God and that you are in command of your life, not some other entity. These forces tell us to just live our life and to feed the flesh at every turn.

The children of God need more than ever to learn how to trust in His goodness, understand how to obey His commands, and have strong faith. There are several steps people take that will help solidify their faith and trust in God.

One huge step is what you are all doing today, coming to church to worship and glorify God. In church you hear about the way God can enrich your life and we are reminded of His great mercy and love. We sing songs of praise and we read scripture that reminds us of why our faith in God is vital. In addition, we interact with the body of Christ and support and strengthen each other.

Another thing to do is to look at your life and see how God has blessed you and how His faithfulness has been present in your life. Our faith will naturally grow when we make a conscious effort to look for ways to trust God. Pray and seek the Lord's help when faced with a need or going through a difficult time in your life. Open your heart to Him and trust that God will order your life in the way He sees as best. Pray not for God to answer what you want but pray "not my will but let yours be done". Pray for the strength to endure. Reflect not just on what you hope God will do with you but praise Him for all the blessings already received. Be humble, and grateful to God. Reflect on God's promises and spend time every day reading His word. Find scripture that speaks to your heart about how God loves you, and how your salvation and eternal life has been secured. Remember the words of Jeremiah 29:11 that tells us "For I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope."

Conclusion

True Biblical faith is not faith in fantasies or in things that are not true, but faith in realities which are unseen by human eyes. The Apostle Paul teaches in Romans that "So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ" Our counselor in Good Will Hunting was trying to show Will that sometimes to define and truly understand something we need to use all of our senses and that understanding comes from growth and experience. Faith is the essence of things hoped for and is strengthened by our experiences. Our hopes lie with God and without Him we are lost. Faith is the evidence of things not seen, things we know to be true, assurances we know will be kept, and a love we know will be present. Next week, during Holy Communion, when Fr. Chris tells us "to draw near with faith and make your humble confession to Almighty God" we know through our faith that God will have mercy on a contrite and repentant heart. We know that we are all sinners and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). Still our faith tells us that God will forgive our sins and that should give us strength to move forward trusting in God's goodness and eager to obey His commandments. Just like the elders named in our reading from Hebrews, we too can "obtain a good report".

To the only wise God our savior, be glory, majesty, dominion, and power.

Both now and forever, Amen

