

# “We Are Certain of What We Do Not See”

Hebrews 11:1-16

Two weeks ago, we heard in our Old Testament reading how Abraham and Sarah, had each laughed at God’s promise to give them a son in their old age. This week in our Old Testament reading, we hear about an earlier episode where the promise of a son was made, and “[Abram] believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness.”

From the first words we hear of Abram (as he was known back then, before God changed his name to Abraham), he had faith. He had faith that the Lord would give him the land of Canaan as an inheritance, even before he had ever seen it. He had faith that he and Sarah would have a son, even though both he and Sarah were advanced in years.

Faith is an amazing thing. Faith is trust in something that we have not seen, or trust in something that we do not fully understand. As you have probably heard me say before: If we only believe the things about God that we understand in our minds, then the God that we believe in can really only be as smart or complex as we are. I rejoice that God is far beyond my mental capabilities.

In the letter to the Hebrews, the ancient people of the Old Testament were commended for having conviction, for being certain of the things which they did not see. As we saw two weeks ago with Abraham and Sarah, it did take several announcements of God's promise before Abraham whole-heartedly believed God's Word that he would have a son in his old age. He and Sarah had laughed at the idea.

We too are often that way. We like things to make sense. We like to see it with our own eyes. We like to understand how everything works. But the reality is that you can't live life only believing something when you see it. This came up a couple of weeks ago.

You don't hoard food in your home fearing that you may never be able to buy food again. Why? Because you believe that you can go to the grocery store and there will be food even though you have not seen it today. The ads in the newspaper claim they have food. You have good reason to have trust and confidence in this. You have a firm foundation on which to place your faith that when you walk into HyVee, you will find real food.

The letter to the Hebrews says, it is only "by faith that we understand that the universe was formed at God's command." There was no one there to witness it other than God, so we have to trust in His Word as He has given it to us. We have faith in that which is unseen. Thanks be to God that He has given us a firm foundation on which we place that faith.

We witness other mysteries of faith all the time – especially in the Sacramental life of the church. This evening/morning at the altar, you will partake in the miraculous union of bread, wine, body, and blood. I can't

explain how it happens other than the Word of God is joined to the visible element. It is beyond my understanding. But Jesus says, “This is My body.” You have a firm foundation on which to place your faith that when you walk up to the Lord’s Table, you will find real food.

We are introduced into the church through a miracle of faith. When a child is brought forth to this baptismal font, what happens here that we actually see with our eyes? The only thing that we see with our eyes is that the kid’s head gets wet.

What is the reason for Baptism? Are our heads dirty? Or is Baptism some ritualistic, symbolic, initiation ceremony that people have to go through in order to become a member of this church? That is a very low view of Baptism. Entering Christ’s Church through Baptism is not like eating a goldfish to get in to a college fraternity.

The Word of God is joined with that water and we are made new – our Old Adam drowns and dies; Paul tells us we are crucified with Christ, buried with Christ in Baptism – raised to a new life in Christ. We are set apart by God because of the faith created in our Baptism. We are set apart because, by the grace of God through that faith, God has forgiven the sin of our repentant hearts. It is the faith that we received in our Baptism and nourish at the altar that makes the difference in our lives. We see the head get wet, but the rest of it requires the eyes of faith for us to be certain of what we do not see.

As a true child, our Father has now reserved a place for you in His eternal kingdom. And He has given you His name which you carry with you.

None of this we can see with our eyes.

Every Saturday or Sunday, when we join together here to worship, we are reminded of our Baptism in that invocation of the name of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Everything that we do within our worship service is founded in our baptismal faith.

It is our faith in Christ's sacrifice for the guilt of our sin; it is our faith in the resurrection of the dead and life everlasting which changed us. It is what separates us and sets us apart from the rest of the people of the world. Those ancient men of faith like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob admitted that they were aliens and strangers here on earth. This temporary world was a foreign place to them because their place with God is eternal – even though it remained unseen during their earthly life.

As God's true children, we are also strangers in this world. We are like Abraham wandering through a foreign land, waiting patiently to receive our eternal inheritance.

Baptism is the beginning of our journey. God feeds us and strengthens us on the way with His Word and Christ's own body and blood. And like all the saints who have gone before us, we journey through this valley of the shadow of death, waiting patiently, in faith, to receive our eternal inheritance which our Father in heaven has prepared for each of us. And for all this, we look to God being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. Amen.