

Devotion: July 21, 2020

Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16

11 ¹Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. ²Indeed, by faith our ancestors received approval. ³By 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.

8 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. ⁹By 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. ¹⁰For he looked forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. ¹¹By 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. ¹²Therefore 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.’

13 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, ¹⁴for people who speak in this way make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. ¹⁵If they had been thinking of the land that they had left behind, they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶But 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.

You turn the key and close the door behind you.

Drop your bags on the floor.

You reach for the light but there's a darkness deep inside

And you can't take it anymore.

'Cause sometimes living takes the life out of you and

Sometimes living is all you can do.

Life is hard.

The world is cold.

We're barely young and then we're old.

But every falling tear is always understood.

Life is hard, but God is good.--- Pam Thum

What is it that enables us to experience and explore the goodness of God in the middle of life's greatest difficulties? How can we let God do the best of things in our lives in the worst of times in our lives? The writer of Hebrews tells us how. It comes from a five-letter word called "faith": the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

The writer of Hebrews defines faith as the ability to see the invisible in the visible, the eternal in the earthly. The list of "by faiths" is the list of leaders like Abraham and Sarah who were able to do the best of things in the worst of times.

Yet living by faith is ironic: The easier it becomes to have faith in the technological world of things human beings have created, the more difficult it is for us to have faith in the promises of God. "Having faith" is not nearly as comforting as "having proof." Living "by faith" is far more frightening to us than living "on credit." Staking our futures on God's promises sounds riskier than investing our futures in the possibilities promised by more technological gadgetry. To "have faith" and to live "by faith" may have been okay for some old wandering Israelite with no mortgage, no car payments, no deadlines, even no children. But we see "faith" as far too shaky a basis for our own complex 21st century lives.

On Earth, where we are "strangers and foreigners," life is difficult. But God is good: We have a "heavenly homeland" or "city" where Jesus' disciples really belong and toward which we journey. Life is difficult: We live in a world of unfulfilled promises and realities. But God is good: We journey toward a future where God's design for creation will be fulfilled.

Hard-pressed on every side ... [LIFE IS DIFFICULT.]

We are never hemmed in ... [GOD IS GOOD.]

Bewildered ... [LIFE IS DIFFICULT.]

We are never at our wits' end ... [GOD IS GOOD.]

Hunted ... [LIFE IS DIFFICULT.]

We are never abandoned to our fate ... [GOD IS GOOD.]

Struck down .. [LIFE IS DIFFICULT.]

We are not left to die ... [GOD IS GOOD.]

Wherever we go we carry death with us in our body, the death that Jesus died ... [LIFE IS DIFFICULT.]

That in this body also life may reveal itself, the life that Jesus lives ... [GOD IS GOOD.]

For continually, while still alive, we are being surrendered into the hands of death ... [LIFE IS DIFFICULT.]

So that the life of Jesus also may be revealed in this mortal body of ours ... [GOD IS GOOD.]

Thus death is at work in us ... [LIFE IS DIFFICULT.]

And life in you ... [GOD IS GOOD.]

So what is faith, really?

Life is difficult. But what? GOD IS GOOD!

Let us pray:

God of love, your constant love extends toward the heavens and your faithfulness reaches the clouds.

You are like a strong mountain and a mighty sea. How precious is your love, O God of power and might.

Your constant love provides shelter and protection. Your love sets a banquet of the finest food. How precious is your love, God of great power and might. Amen.