

FAITH LOOKS OVER THE HILL
13th SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

HEB 11:17-12:3
AUG 14, '16

¹⁷ By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, ¹⁸ of whom it was said, "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named." ¹⁹ He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back. ²⁰ By faith Isaac invoked future blessings on Jacob and Esau. ²¹ By faith Jacob, when dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, bowing in worship over the head of his staff. ²² By faith Joseph, at the end of his life, made mention of the exodus of the Israelites and gave directions concerning his bones.

²³ By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents, because they saw that the child was beautiful, and they were not afraid of the king's edict. ²⁴ By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, ²⁵ choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. ²⁶ He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward. ²⁷ By faith he left Egypt, not being afraid of the anger of the king, for he endured as seeing him who is invisible. ²⁸ By faith he kept the Passover and sprinkled the blood, so that the Destroyer of the firstborn might not touch them.

²⁹ By faith the people crossed the Red Sea as if on dry land, but the Egyptians, when they attempted to do the same, were drowned. ³⁰ By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for seven days. ³¹ By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had given a friendly welcome to the spies.

³² And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets—³³ who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, ³⁴ quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. ³⁵ Women received back their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. ³⁶ Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. ³⁷ They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated—³⁸ of whom the world was not worthy— wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.

³⁹ And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, ⁴⁰ since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.

^{12:1} Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ² looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy

that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

³ Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.

Once my wife & I were riding with her sister, going to her house in car with new GPS system.

It told her to turn on a certain road but she knew that wasn't the way to go. It must be malfunction.

Within minutes we were in traffic jam that went for miles.

She should have trusted the GPS.

It is not just when driving that we might act differently if we could see what was over the next hill.

Text is saying faith is looking over the hill by trusting what God tells us in his word.

FAITH LED PATRIARCHS TO DO WHAT LOOKED DUMB
FAITH LEADS PEOPLE TO DO WHAT LOOKS DIFFICULT
FAITH LOOKS TO WHAT JESUS DOES FOR US

FAITH LED PATRIARCHS TO DO WHAT LOOKED DUMB

¹⁷ By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, ¹⁸ of whom it was said, "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named." ¹⁹ He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back. ²⁰ By faith Isaac invoked future blessings on Jacob and Esau. ²¹ By faith Jacob, when dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, bowing in worship over the head of his staff.

There was once TV show about man who every morning got next day's newspaper, so he saw ahead of time what was going to happen: accidents, robberies, etc. and he set out to try to change that.

He did seemly crazy things and had problems as result.

Some might think what was really dumb was that he didn't use paper to get rich on stock market.

Text tells of those who did crazy things because of faith.

Abraham offering up Isaac is familiar example of faith.

But what about Isaac blessing Jacob & Esau?

Normally oldest son got most inheritance & best blessing.

But he Isaac did it backwards. Why?

God said when they were born, older will serve younger.

Jacob follows this example when giving his dying blessing to his grandsons. He crosses his arms to put right hand on younger son and give him the better blessing.

The point is that faith leads people to do things backwards, like Abraham acting to kill his own son because God said so, trusting that God would somehow raise him from dead since Abraham himself was good as dead before he had him. In same way, others did crazy things,

Joseph directed that 400 years in future his bones should be removed from tomb in Egypt and carried away.

Moses gave up position as Pharaoh's heir to be with slaves.

People of Israel marched right into the sea.

Rahab, in Jericho, helped the invading enemy.

All because they believed what God had said.

Israel marched 7 times around Jericho. That seemed crazy.

It took 40 years of crazy things like water coming from rock, flakes of food appearing on ground, being healed by looking at a brass snake, to get them to obey a dumb order like that.

It was crazy for Gideon to deliberately reduce his army before going into battle with Midian with no real weapons.

It was crazy for a poor Sidonian woman with a starving son to give what little food she had to an Israelite who shows up, with no hint he would later raise her son from the dead.

It was stupid of Daniel and his friends, when threatened with being burned alive or eaten by lions if they disobeyed orders to just say, well, go ahead then.

Jesus says in Gospel we too will do crazy, backward things.

Normal is to put self first, family second, all the rest third.

Jesus promises not peace but division, when we put God's kingdom first, family second, self last.

On a beautiful summer weekend morning it may seem silly to get up early, get dressed up, so sit inside a church.

It feels dumb to just do what one is told by old fashioned parents who don't really get how things work today.

It is ridiculous that woman can't do what she wants with body, and whole life could be disrupted for sake of a few cells of a different life inside her no one can even see yet.

It feels right to do what love makes you feel by having sex and makes sense to try out relationship by living together and if we say "not until marriage," what is wrong with you?

Of course you should do all you can to get ahead
without going out of way to help strangers and foreigners.
Except when we actually believe what God says
and trust his promises enough to do what he tells us
even when we don't yet see how his way is the best.
But here is the catch, not all the examples of heroes of faith
to which text refers ended up in the same way.

FAITH LEADS PEOPLE TO DO WHAT LOOKS DIFFICULT

³⁵ Women received back their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. ³⁶ Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment.

³⁹ And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, ⁴⁰ since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.

During Olympics we recognize as heroes and role models
those who struggle & work hard to become great success.
But aren't those even more heroic who work just as hard
without ever being rewarded with glory or success.
In real life, not everyone is going to win
but everyone will have to endure difficulty & do it well.
World's idea of faith is confidence everything will turn out fine
and puts faith in faith itself. If you believe something enough
you can make it happen.

This is like what Prophet Jeremiah says of false prophets:
They say continually to those who despise the word of the LORD,
'It shall be well with you'; and to everyone who stubbornly follows
his own heart, they say, 'No disaster shall come upon you.'

What Bible means by faith is not just confidence in good
but confidence in God and what God actually says.
This is why a few received their dead back by resurrection
but many deliberately chose not to be escape suffering
because of their hope in a better resurrection.
They were willing to accept suffering which means it
didn't look like they were loved and blessed by God
because they believed God really did love them
and they already had his greatest blessings.
Moses turned his back on all he could have accomplished
as a privileged grandson of Pharaoh
preferring reproach of Christ, that Christ experienced,

rather than the reproach that comes from Christ
if he had participated in what led to sin.
There may be times when we too, are faced with the choice
of what is difficult and may even seem dumb.
When there are fees or fines for those who refuse to
fund abortion through insurance programs
or participate in homosexual weddings
or give in to other directives that seem only right and fair
to those who don't accept what is revealed
in God's creation or in his word.
When faced with loss or jobs, businesses or even churches
we may feel we have not choice, but we do
We can chose that if that is way it is we will suffer.
Just as there continue to be those around the world
who respond this way and so continue to experience,
like those in text, beating, imprisonment, homelessness,
and loss of families or very lives for the sake of their faith.
They do this not just in order to gain something more valuable
but because they already have that which is most precious.
v. 29 says of both those who continued to suffer and those
who's faith was vindicated by great blessings or victories
that they did not yet receive what was promised.
because it is still over the hill, on other side of death.
But we can see it when we look at Jesus.

FAITH LOOKS TO WHAT JESUS DOES FOR US

^{12:1} Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of
witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so
closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ²
looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy
that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is
seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

³ Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against
himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.

Jesus, in Gospel mentions predicting weather by looking at sky.
Now people don't look up sky, just go on weather.com.
Years ago, there was no long range forecast
so people keep eye on birds or squirrels or other critters
for clues on what to expect and be ready for.
Text doesn't say watch animals but keep eyes on Jesus.
Jesus says people don't know how to interpret the present time.

How do you do that? Not by looking at future you can't see
but looking at past, especially as revealed in God's word.
God's word reveals to us something all those in text didn't have:
the fulfillment of God's promises through Jesus.

There is a great cloud of witnesses surrounding us
as we continue to run our race.

They are not just spectators like those at Olympic events
but fellow participants who have crossed finish line
And they are not looking at us as they cheer, so much as
looking at Jesus and pointing us to his victory.

Jesus is the one who chose to leave not just Pharaoh's house
but the glory of his Father's house in heaven.

He plunged, not into the divided red sea
but into the still churning sea of our sinful world.

He deliberately chose suffering & torture,
refusing to accept release

He willingly sacrificed, not his son, but himself.

He did all this because he looked over the hill of Calvary
and saw the resurrection,

not just his own but ours because of what he did for us.

He has given a blessing that does things backwards.

He has given us all the blessings he deserved
as the firstborn son of God.

God's eternal love, the continued forgiveness of our sins
and all the times we fail to be faithful and obedient,

And the resurrection to a better life that is better
than anything this world could ever contain & is eternal.

He gives us all these blessings through his word
which means they are received through faith.

He himself gives us this word and this faith
with the water that is poured out on children in baptism,
and he gives us this forgiveness and everlasting life
by along with the very body and blood he gave for us,
with the bread and wine we eat in Holy Communion.

about which the world and even many Christians say,
Oh, for dumb! You've got to be kidding.

But here faith sees over the hill. Faith sees Jesus.

this FAITH LED PATRIARCHS TO DO WHAT LOOKED DUMB
and backward because they trusted God's word.

FAITH LEADS PEOPLE TO DO WHAT LOOKS DIFFICULT
even disastrous because of they are looking toward.

FAITH LOOKS TO WHAT JESUS DOES FOR US

What he has already done for us on the cross
which promises us God's love and forgiveness
and what he continues to do through his word & sacraments
which promise us everlasting life.