

Heroes of Faith Hall of Fame
Proper 15C - 2010 August 15, 2010
Based on Hebrews 11 & 12
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I would like to focus on the second reading from Hebrews today. It's a truly beautiful passage. It's like a "Hall of Fame" for the heroes of faith. Throughout the 11th chapter of Hebrews, the writer recounts the many stories of the people of faith we meet in the Bible.

By faith Noah built a large boat to save his family and the animals from the flood.

By faith Abraham obeyed when God called him to leave home and go to another land.

By faith Sarah was able to have a child, though she was barren and too old.

By faith Abraham was willing to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice.

By faith Moses' parents hid him when he was born in order to save him from Pharaoh's wrath.

By faith the people of Israel walked through the Red Sea in order to find freedom.

By faith, the people of Israel marched around Jericho for seven days believing that the wall would come crashing down.

The list goes on and on of people who chose to live by faith.

There was Gideon, who was victorious over *thousands* of Ammonites even though his army only had *three hundred*; David, who was anointed king as a young boy, ultimately established the greatest Christian empire on earth.

There is, as the writer of Hebrews says, a great cloud of witnesses that has come before us.

Stop and think for a moment. What would have happened if any one of those faith heroes would have not taken the leap of faith that God asked of them? What if Abraham had refused to leave his homeland? Or David had not accepted the title of "King?"

God's entire plan of salvation would have been disrupted, possibly halted. The opening chapter of the gospel of Matthew tells us that Joseph, husband of the virgin

Mary, was kinfolk to King David. So Jesus is ultimately revealed to us through the family of King David.

King David's willingness to live by faith ultimately leads to the Savior of the world being revealed. Even though all of the faith heroes mentioned in the book of Hebrews are long gone, the choices they made in life and the values they chose to live by affected future generations.

That's an important spiritual truth to remember. The choices made by the past generations of believers have effected the present generation. Case in point: If it weren't for my great grandparents sharing their faith with my grandparents, and then them sharing their faith with my parents, and then my parents instilling the Christian faith in me – if it weren't for all those people boldly sharing their faith – it is very unlikely that I would be standing in this pulpit today. Because my ancestors chose to pass on the Christian faith to others, each and every person of my family tree – whether I met them or not – had a role in me becoming a follower of Jesus Christ.

In the circle of life, our lives are intertwined with those who have gone before us, and with those who are yet to come.

I also realize that if it weren't for my exposure to an incredible Lutheran pastor growing up, and if it weren't for his courageous invitation to me, I probably would have never even considered becoming a pastor. I have the faith that I do this day because of the former generations boldly living out the Christian faith in their daily lives. Their lives, their choices, their values shaped me into the person that I am today. All of the generations of people who had a spiritual impact on me have earned their place in the Heroes of Faith Hall of Fame. By their faith and witness, I became a Christian. By their encouragement, I am a pastor.

Think for a moment: Who are those people in your life who introduced you to Jesus? Who are those individuals who modeled the Christian faith for you, whose lives gave you a glimpse of Jesus simply by watching them in action?

Maybe it was a parent, grandparent or spouse; maybe it was friend, pastor, or teacher. Whoever it was, you sit here today in this place because they took the time to tell you about Jesus. They lived their lives in such a way that made you curious about this whole faith thing.

If, by chance, those people are still alive, I encourage you to send them a letter or e-mail, or give them a call, to thank them for the Christian witness they have been to you. Thank them for helping you "keep your eyes fixed on Jesus." Often times, such people have no idea what impact they had in our lives.

In a sermon I preached at my home congregation soon after I was ordained, I remember publicly thanking my two high school Sunday School teachers for the way

they made the Christian faith come alive for me. After the service, both of them came up to me and admitted they were taken aback by my comment. They were both lay members, neither one having any kind of formal Bible training. One teacher admitted, "That class always made me feel like a fish out of water!" But their commitment to us kids, and their willingness to journey with us as we learned about Jesus, I will never forget it. Larry Lindsey and Shelton Albrecht will always have a place in my Heroes of Faith Hall of Fame.

Just a few people – a few Heroes of Faith who listen to the Spirit's leading – can literally change lives. God can do great things through just a few people who choose to give their heart to Him.

Think about this: We would not be sitting here today if it were not for people like Henry Scharff who, despite the odds, did what was necessary to form a Lutheran congregation here in Sherman, Texas.

We would not be here if it weren't for the many faithful pastors – Probst, Adix, Johnson, Carroll, and myself – who accepted the call to serve the people of God here in this place.

The faithful witness of these Heroes of Faith have blessed this congregation and made it possible for us to become this vibrant, faith-filled family that we are today.

If the Heroes of Faith of past generations directly affected our lives, then it only follows that the Heroes of Faith of today – that's you and me – we will affect the lives of future generations. If we do not share our faith with this generation – and the next generation – then the Christian church will not continue to thrive and grow. We must become "Heroes of Faith" to others.

We must center our lives on the Word of God and faithfully strive to live out biblical truths in our daily lives. We must listen for the voice of God and heed His instruction. We must model for others Christ-centered lives. Others should get a glimpse of Jesus simply by watching us in action.

Heroes of Faith come in all forms:

A doctor who prays with his patients before surgery.

A dad who gets up at dawn, works in the heat all in day, then still finds time in the evening to be a Big Brother to a young man without a dad.

The high school student who is not ashamed to talk about Jesus despite the school policy.

The elderly woman who is among the most generous givers in her congregation although she lives on a fixed income.

A teacher who says, "I know you can do it," and stands by you until you can.

Each of us needs to ask ourselves: Who would consider me their Hero of Faith? To whom am I sharing my faith? To whom have I made the love of Christ known? What life have I impacted through my Christian example?

If we don't become the "Heroes of Faith" to the next generation, then who will?

Our calling as Christians is to tell the story of Jesus. "Go," Jesus says at the close of Matthew's Gospel, "and teach others what I have taught you." Share the story. Tell others about the amazing grace that God has extended to the world. Live out your faith. Walk the talk.

Above all, "keep your eyes fixed on Jesus." Spend time daily in the Word. With every decision you make, every word you speak, ask, "What would Jesus do?" Then follow Christ's example.

We must live with the realization that for some in this world, we might be the only Bible they ever read. How we live our lives and how we relate to others may be the only example of Christ they ever experience. Let it be a wake-up call to us.

We must tell the story. Live the faith. Share the love of Christ. To live by such principles will assist us in becoming "Heroes of Faith" to the next generation.

Let it be so. Amen.