

## **NORTH MAIN SERMON AUGUST 10, 2025...**

Our relationship to God is not static or fixed. Our relationship with God, which we call “faith,” is best characterized as a journey, a movement from where we are to where God intends us to be, a pilgrimage whereby we are drawn, step-by-step, closer to God and neighbor.

### **Hebrews 11:1-3**

Our Reading from Hebrews today can be called ..Faith in Action

**11** Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. <sup>2</sup> This is what the ancients were commended for.

<sup>3</sup> By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.

### **Hebrews 11:8-16**

This is the great “hymn to faith” in which the writer to the Hebrews recounts the roll call of heroes in the faith.

<sup>8</sup> By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. <sup>9</sup> By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. <sup>10</sup> For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God. <sup>11</sup> And by faith even Sarah, who was past childbearing age, was enabled to bear children because she<sup>[a]</sup> considered him faithful who had made the promise. <sup>12</sup> And so from this one man, and he as good as dead, came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore. <sup>13</sup> All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth. <sup>14</sup> People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. <sup>15</sup> If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. <sup>16</sup> Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly

one. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.

### **Our Gospel reading is from Luke 12:32-40**

Jesus urges his followers to put their trust in the things of the kingdom rather than in material possessions and to be ever watchful against greed.

“Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. <sup>33</sup> Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will never fail, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. <sup>34</sup> For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. <sup>35</sup> “Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, <sup>36</sup> like servants waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks they can immediately open the door for him. <sup>37</sup> It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. Truly I tell you, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them. <sup>38</sup> It will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready, even if he comes in the middle of the night or toward daybreak. <sup>39</sup> But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. <sup>40</sup> You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.”

### **THE WORD OF GOD..**

We could start our sermon today by simply saying, Gracious God, we may have come here today to settle all the questions we have about life, to fix our faith, to be settled and certain about deep and complex matters. But that's not the way it usually goes between you and us. We want things to be fixed, settled, and certain; you keep prodding us, moving us, beckoning us forward in faith. Sometimes it's tough for us to keep up with you. We would like for things to grow calm in our lives; we long to rest and to have stability. What we do instead of having faith is we forget about it and grow anxious and nervous and worry about everything.. We lose sight of our faith instead of asking you to give us the faith to follow where you lead us. For the next few Sundays, the epistle reading is from Hebrews. Today's reading is one of the most well-loved readings in the

entire epistle. It is part of the roll call of faith. It focuses mainly on Abraham and Sarah, opening with a definition of faith. Faith is the reality of what we hope for, the proof of what we don't see. The elders in the past were approved because they showed faith. By faith, we venture forth into a future that we don't yet see. We venture with confident expectancy, certain of God's continuing care of us, even as Abraham and Sarah ventured forth. Part of the adventure of any good journey is that we have no way of knowing just how the journey will end. So it is with the journey with and to God, known as faith. In our interpretation of this passage and in our proclamation, we will follow the epistle writer in looking back to the biblical record of heroes of faith. Abraham was not the only pilgrim in scripture. The theme of journey, of venturing forth with God, is a frequent one in the Bible. In our lives of faith today, the journey with God continues. In this Sunday's Gospel, Jesus tells us to be prepared: "Be dressed for service and keep your lamps lit. Be like people waiting for their master to come . . . who can immediately open the door for him when he arrives and knocks on the door" Jesus tells us to be prepared not only for the arrival of God but also the summons of God, the invitation of the master who comes to us and invites us to venture forth. In light of this Sunday's epistle, it seems that it's good to characterize "faith" as a willingness to venture forth on the basis of God's invitation to a journey.

It's summer, so many of you have been on vacation trips. It's great to be on these summer journeys. How appropriate then on this summer Sunday to come to church and be reminded that much of the Bible is concerned with people on a journey. When the Bible begins in Genesis, everything is settled, situated life in a good garden. But a couple of chapters later, Adam and Eve must leave the garden, venture forth, and the journey begins. Human history, the way the Bible tells it, is destined to be no tame, ordered, stay-at-home affair. Remember how Noah becomes a sailor and ventures forth over the dark waters in ark on an uncertain journey. The story of God's people, Israel, begins with the journey of an old couple, Abraham and Sarah. Abraham ventures forth, as today's lesson from Hebrews puts it, "without knowing where he was going". They venture forth not only geographically, to a different location on the map, but also spiritually, to a different location in their world. Abraham had been promised that he would be the father of a great nation, even though Sarah "was barren and past the age for having children" —and

even though Abraham was, “as good as dead” in age, by the power of God, Abraham and Sarah were given a child, a future they didn’t know they would have, and the family of Israel was born.

Then, through a weird set of events Abraham and Sarah’s descendants are enslaved in Egypt. God heard the cries of the slaves and called Moses to lead them out of slavery. A fresh new journey began, the journey called Exodus. The third great journey of the Hebrew scriptures is the journey out of exile. God returned to the chosen people. The Hebrews were liberated, and they journeyed back home. Isaiah promised them a homecoming in which the journey would be made easier by God and their beloved Jerusalem would be rebuilt. The God of Israel beckons, calls forth, evokes, pushes each of us on journeys.

That’s why we shouldn’t be surprised to find that the Gospels, including the Gospel of Luke that we’ve been reading this year, presents Jesus as being on a perpetual road trip. Jesus’ followers are presented in just that way—as followers, followers after Jesus. Followers of Jesus don’t just sit at his feet taking accurate lecture notes; they move with Jesus, attempt to keep up with him as he goes from place to place. Let’s be honest: There’s something about us that yearns to settle down in one place, put down roots, bolt down the furniture. But that’s not the way it seems with Jesus. He is always on the move. Discipleship means being on the road with Jesus. To be a Christian means to be on a journey with Jesus. Jesus makes all of us itinerants. Jesus said that he was homeless. He had nowhere to lay his head, no permanent resting place, and neither would his followers. If you have no place to live “How would you know if you were a Christian?” When the writer to the Hebrews speaks of “faith,” the writer doesn’t list a set of beliefs that Christians must affirm. Hebrews doesn’t list a set of events that we must believe to be historical facts. Rather, the writer speaks of faith in action, faith as a journey in which people, having been met by God, venture forth with God. We are thereby invited to think about faith as a journey. Faith is a venturing forth with God, just like Abraham and Sarah. No wonder that in today’s Gospel Jesus tells his disciples, “Don’t be afraid. Sometimes we are afraid to venture forth. We hold tight to old securities, comfortable patterns. We want assurance that the trip will be worth it. Where are we headed, anyway?

Will there be difficult hardships along the way? But this God is forever on the move, and we must be courageous enough to move with him.

Look at us here today. We sit in our substantial, church building. An outsider looking at us might come to the conclusion that the purpose of the church is to get settled in with unshakable faith,”. But no, the writer to the Hebrews reminds us that being a disciple of Jesus is a good deal more exciting. It’s an adventure, a journey. We come here on Sunday not to settle down, settle in. We come here to summon up the fortitude to venture forth with Jesus on his journey. People sometimes talk about how easy their relationship with God is.. everything has worked out well for me. That may be the way faith has happened for them. But if you listen to the testimony of the Letter to the Hebrews, this recollection of people like Abraham and Sarah and of their walk with God, you see that the Christian life is more accurately described as a journey with ups and downs, gifts and demands, hills and valleys. Jesus takes us to another place and another journey. Jesus urges his followers not to settle their faith in material things or trust their security to possessions but rather to trust him, to not fear clinging to him rather than to their stuff. In our passage from Hebrews this Sunday, the writer says that faithful followers like Abraham and Sarah had their eyes set on a better place. Perhaps that’s the vision that gives birth to real faith—to have some sense of discontent with present arrangements, to long for more, to expect that God has more interesting things to do with us than we have been led to believe. This gladness is experienced, in part, as a new knowing as one who lives out a relationship with God. And a Christian is one who lives out their relationship with God. . . .Let us pray..Renew, O God, our sense of the adventure of being loved by you. Give us the courage to have a new journey with you. Rekindle our enthusiasm for following in your footsteps. Grant us courage to dare to walk where you lead. Give us faith to follow you. Amen.