



ELIZABETHTOWN
CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN

PRACTICING PEACE, SERVICE AND OPENNESS TO ALL

High Hopes

Hebrews 11

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FOLLOWING COMMUNION...

Whether they knew it or not the disciples were at a moment of significant transition and change. They were struggling to understand what Jesus was doing and wanted them to do. The world around them was chaos. And little did they know just how much more chaotic things would get in the coming days. How much more commitment and sacrifice and faith would be required of them. Yet, somehow—**by faith**—here we are practicing this same act of commitment and love that they did some 2,000 years ago.

But what does that mean when I say “by faith.” One of my favorite scriptures is Hebrews 11, “Faith is the assurance of things hoped for; the conviction of things not seen.” But what does that mean?

HEBREWS 11

The fundamental fact of existence is that this trust in God, this faith, is the firm foundation under everything that makes life worth living. It's our handle on what we can't see. The act of faith is what distinguished our ancestors, set them above the crowd. By faith, we see the world called into existence by God's word, what we see created by what we don't see.

Faith is trust in God. And that this trust in God holds us up even though we can't see it. Often we get tangled in the notion that faith is some set of intellectual beliefs like the virgin birth. (News flash: that's not the way the Bible defines it). Faith, is standing up, walking, running even when we can't see the ground our feet are on. The author goes on to name those who did just that...

By an act of faith, Abel brought a better sacrifice to God than Cain....

By an act of faith, Enoch skipped death completely....

By faith, Noah built a ship in the middle of dry land....

By an act of faith, Abraham said yes to God's call to travel to an unknown place....

By faith, Sarah was able to become pregnant....

2 *I could go on and on, but I've run out of time. There are so many more—Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, the prophets.... Through acts of faith, they toppled kingdoms, made justice work, took the promises for themselves. They were protected from lions, fires, and sword thrusts, turned disadvantage to advantage, won battles, routed alien armies. Women received their loved ones back from the dead....*

BY FAITH IN 2018, THE ELIZABETHTOWN CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN...

- ...stood up for our Jewish and Muslim brothers and sisters in faith who were harassed, threatened and, yes, even murdered.
- By faith...the Elizabethtown Church of the Brethren made special efforts to reach out to those who are vulnerable: the poor, the disadvantaged and disenfranchised, the stranger and immigrant. Volunteering thousands of hours re-building homes destroyed by natural disaster, sorting food, renovating Community Place on Washington Street, caring for children, preparing beds for the homeless.
- By faith...this was the most generous year ever in this congregation with offerings of nearly \$800,000, PLUS special giving. This giving supported our many ministries, provided a home for children and families in the community via the Nursery School and the Day Care, gave more than \$100,000 to organizations that support the most vulnerable near and far. Wow!
- By faith...We moved ever closer to a building campaign that will upgrade our aging facility so we can continue to provide for these important ministries, AND expand our building so we can reach out further than ever. You all know not to miss the Campaign Kick-off next week!

- By faith...we held fast to our standard that God's love and Christ's church really is for all people, no matter one's sexuality. Even in the face of threats from within our denomination. We held fast and we responded in loving kindness.
- By faith...new friends joined our body and became members.
- By faith...we raised money for four years so our youth could have a faith experience of a lifetime at National Youth Conference in Colorado.

Like the writer of the scripture says, "I could go on and on, but I don't have the time." We see fruits of all of these acts of faith.

But you know that's not what this scripture is really about. It's about acting in faith even though we may never see or taste the fruits of faithful acts.

Not one of these people, even though their lives of faith were exemplary, got their hands on what was promised.

God had a better plan for us: that their faith and our faith would come together to make one completed whole, their lives of faith not complete apart from ours.

**"FAITH IS THE ASSURANCE OF THINGS HOPED FOR;
THE CONVICTION OF THINGS NOT SEEN."**

To have faith is to continue to act in hope, even when things are difficult. To believe that we are part of God's story that has a past and a future, and that what we do matters in that story.

And that is where I find the most hope.

As we turn towards the new year...

I have faith that god provides the firm foundation upon which we stand.

I have faith that peace, service, and openness to all matters to God and to the world. Do you?

4 I also have faith that others will join us in this mission.
I have faith that what we do as a congregation makes a difference in this world. Not only today but in 10 years, in 20 years in 50 years? Do you?! Will you join me?

BENEDICTION

By faith we live into this world as followers of Jesus... This place, our call as a people, are needed now as much as ever.

