

KAILUA CHRISTIAN CHURCH (UCC)
Sunday, July 30, 2023
“Moving Forward in Faith” Hebrews 11:1-3
Rev. Alpha Goto

Hebrews 11:1-3 NRSV

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

What new adventure, possibility, are you right on the verge of? Kailua Christian Church is certainly on edge of new adventure, new ministries with a new pastor and leadership.

New adventures and new possibilities are what Abraham in the Old Testament is all about. Abraham is a major figure not only in Christianity but also in Judaism and Islam.

Genesis 12:1-3: ***“God had told Abram, ‘Leave your own country behind you, & your own people, and go to the land I will guide you to. 2 If you do, I will cause you to be the father of a great nation; I will bless you and make your name famous, and you will be a blessing to many others. 3 I will bless those who bless you & curse those who curse you and the entire world will be blessed because of you.’”***

Today, we are going to look at 4 lessons of faith by Abraham from Hebrews 11. Those 4 lessons are indicated by the phrase ***“By faith...”***

1. BY FAITH HE _____.

Hebrews 11:8: ***“BY FAITH Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as an inheritance, obeyed and went, even tho he didn’t know where he was going.”***

Abraham was living in the city called Ur. Ur was the greatest city of that period. It was located near present day Baghdad in Iraq. The Euphrates River ran through it, and it had a pleasant climate and was lush, fertile, and rich. Ur was a major center of culture, science, trade, they even invented lawyers. They had a 12-story high-rise in the city center, and this was 4000 BC. And they also knew how to have fun there with music, dance, arts, lavish homes and furnishings and fashion. Abraham was one of the most prominent and wealthiest citizens of Ur. Scripture says he had over 50 servants in his home. Ur was a great place to be, and

because of this, the people of Ur did not like to travel, because those outside of Ur were described in ancient records as uncivilized, wild savages like caveman.

All this to give you an appreciation for what God was asking Abraham to do. Abraham had power, prestige and pleasure, but God was calling Abraham to purpose, His Purpose. How does that apply to us? All of us are moving from what we are familiar with to unknown territory. We are facing an unknown future that is not clear, no matter how hard we try to make it so.

Scripture says Abraham **“obeyed & went”**. He stepped out into unfamiliar territory to receive his inheritance. Yet there was no inheritance. He had no children, and he was too old. But remember you’re never too old, and you’re never too young. That’s because nobody has a lock in the future, especially the future God has for us.

“By faith”, Abraham stepped out, but it was one step at a time. He saw the next step, but not the whole journey or destination. So often we want a detailed map, even photos and GPS before we start out into a new direction. But not Abraham, he didn’t know where he was headed, or his final destination. He only knew the first step; He obeyed God and went. We need to do that too.

2. BY FAITH HE _____

Hebrews 11:9: **“BY FAITH he made his home in the Promised Land. A stranger in a foreign land; he lived in tents as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise, for he was looking forward to the city w foundations whose Architect and Builder is God.”**

Have you ever noticed that many times staying with it is harder than stepping out. After stepping out, Abraham was homeless really and wandered as a stranger in a strange land. The rocks under his sleeping bag must’ve felt bigger and harder the longer he slept on them.

But notice Abraham was **“looking forward”**. Even if it’s heaven, that’s OK maybe that’s what Abraham thought. God gave Abraham the promise, but it was a promise had not been realized. In fact, for 25 years nothing happened. I don’t know why God delays, but I know sometimes He does. And things for Abraham went from bad to worse to impossible.

Then when God does do something, God decides to change Abraham’s name (Gen. 17:5ff) God sometimes does that to reflect His promise fulfilled on that person. Before this, Abraham’s name was actually “Abram” which meant “father”. But you’re old, you have no kids, and your wife is infertile, and your name is “Father” Then God changes your name, from Abram “father” to Abraham which means “great father”, or “father of

many". But Abraham is still old, Sarah still barren, and he got no kids. So how does Abraham handle this?

3. BY FAITH HE _____

Hebrews 11:11: ***"BY FAITH Abraham, even tho he was past age and Sarah herself was barren, was able to become a father because he considered Him faithful Who had made the promise."***

Abraham knew that God is faithful. It wasn't that Abraham was faithful, or how many resources he had or how many bottles of Viagra he had. God was the One to make it happen. And Abraham's faith was in God. But this faith that Abraham had in God was not instant, it didn't happen overnight. In fact, you can see Abraham's growth and faith in three stages reflected in three sons. I think they represent the stages many of growth in faith we go through also.

Eliezer was a son of one of Abraham's servants (Gen. 15:2-6) Abraham decides to call him my son like thinking *"I'll settle for less. I'll call my servant's son, my son."* That's exaggeration, like calling call sack of rice "maki sushi".

Then Ishmael (Gen. 16:1-2) is Abraham biological son through Hagar, Sarah's servant. That's like: *"I'll take a short cut. I have hopes, dreams, plans and I'll get them my way."*

Finally, Abraham says: *"I'll trust God."* So finally, God says "Now it is the time!" Isaac is born (Gen. 21:1-3, 5-6). Abraham is 100 years old, and Sarah is close. It seems so ludicrous that Sarah laughs aloud. In fact, this miracle son Isaac means "laughter".

I think this means after all our struggles, our shortcuts, compromises, our mistakes... God still is tender hearted and good humored with us, and God still brings us His purpose. Wow!

Hebrews 11:12: ***"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."***

See that phrase *"...he as good as dead"*? This IS how God works. When everything seems lost,

when you're at end of your rope... God turns dead ends into new beginnings. That's so great!

4. BY FAITH HE _____

Hebrews 11:17: ***"BY FAITH Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice..."***

This passage was very troubling to me, especially when my daughter was born. Because there is absolutely NO way would I even consider this. I believe that it is not in God's nature to test you or me in this way. I think this test was reserved for only one man in history, Abraham. It does not apply to us in the same way. Perhaps the principle may apply but not God's request to sacrifice our child.

You may know that child sacrifice was common during these times in cultures around Abraham. And that was all about humans getting God's attention, so God would hear and answer people's prayers. There was human sacrifice, cutting yourself, bleeding, doing all kinds of bizarre things to get God's attention.

But in this passage about Abraham and Isaac, God flips everything upside down. As Abraham is about to sacrifice Isaac, God says "Stop!" and God provides a lamb as the sacrifice. It's as if God is saying, "You don't provide the sacrifice, I do." The ultimate example of this paradigm shift is Jesus' death on the cross.

I know the Cross and crucifixion is not a very popular idea, but I think, in the most unforgettable way, it shows that the sacrifice that is required for sin is not made by US for God, but by GOD for us. God provides the way to be redeemed. We are only asked to believe it's true and accept and receive it.

Romans 4:18: ***"Abraham believed in God Who gives life to the dead and Who creates something out of nothing."*** You see that? ***"God Who gives life to the dead and Who creates something out of nothing."*** God does that for your life too.

In fact, that is God's specialty - because only God can do that. Sometimes we all come to the place where what we need, or what is required is something that ONLY God can do.

Like a mainline, protestant, UCC church addressing the challenges of today, seeking its journey of faith and mission in future. But God doesn't tell us HOW He will do it. God doesn't give us the whole picture, the detailed map, because God wants us to trust Him. And trust is built one step at a time.

Ask yourself: What is the next step of faith for me? Maybe it's to commit to a spiritual discipline... or moving into a new ministry... or learning a new skill. Maybe it's thinking about Jesus' sacrifice in a new way, or letting God be sovereign in a problem I'm facing.

Where is it that you feel God calling you to? Whispering in your ear? Maybe it's simply inviting a lonely person over for lunch. Or sending an email to someone you haven't connected with in a while. Take the first step, believe in God, trust God, and follow God for the rest.

AMEN.