

## Ordinary Sunday 19

*Isaiah 1:1, 10-20; Psalm 50:1-8, 23-24; Heb 11:1-3, 8-16; Luke 12:32-40*

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

Our New Testament reading this morning was that wonderful piece from Hebrews concerning the nature of faith. The author has in the previous chapter argued that faith is the guiding principle of spiritual life and the impetus of patient endurance. He has quoted the great saying from Habakkuk, “The just shall live by faith” and here at the beginning of the reading, he proceeds to define faith as “the assurance — the substance—of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” And then he fleshes out his definition not by a theological argument but rather by a description of the results of faith in the lives of the great heroes of Israel, people whose very lives were a testimony to the faith in God, which was central to them. Faith, which for them was the unseen foundation, the bedrock, as it were, which guaranteed the future possession of all that God had promised.

And the same thought comes out in our gospel reading today where Jesus says to his disciples “Fear not, little flock, it is the Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”

Faith and fear, are quite unable to co-exist. Faith is the antithesis of fear.

“Do not live in fear” Jesus says to his disciples — and to us. Instead know that the kingdom is yours. What God has promised, God will perform.

The author of Hebrews holds up for us the example of Abraham, the great father of the faithful, the man who left kith and kin in the land of the Chaldeans in Mesopotamia and moved out on a journey with God to the land of Canaan, a place he had never been.

He accepted God’s challenge and obeyed God’s call because he trusted God and believed God’s promises.

Another proof of his enduring faith is seen in his willingness to dwell as a stranger in the land which he had been promised without rights or

possessions—although eventually he did purchase a small piece of land as a burying place. Abraham's faith was such that he was willing to live as an alien in his own land.

And even more. Abraham was the man to whom with his wife Sarah, God promised descendants more numerous than the stars in the sky. But then no children came. Think of the faith required to believe in that promise as the years went by and the biological clocks of the two of them wound down.

Remember the story of how when the three messengers from God came to Abraham and Sarah in their old age and told them that within the next year they would become parents—and Sarah laughed because it all seemed so ridiculous—And yet God's promise was made good and Isaac was born.

That is the kind of faith to which we are called— that firm trust in God's calling to us, that willingness to obey.

In our life as Christians we are called to be what my friend Graham Garrett describes as Saturday people— people who live in a world in which there is trouble and misfortune and sickness and even disaster: a world the reality of which is expressed in the pain and the suffering of Good Friday and yet people who see the glory of the promise fulfilled on Easter morning. And it is toward that promise that we who live in the indeterminate time of Saturday the time of waiting, the time for faith and for hope—It is toward that promise that we set our hearts and our faces.

“Do not be afraid,” Jesus says to his disciples in today's gospel, “Do not be afraid, because it is God the Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Set your minds on the kingdom. Don't worry about your possessions; in fact, sell them and share what you have with the poor. Set your hearts on the treasure of heaven— God's treasure which cannot fail. In the words of the author of Hebrews, set your minds on the heavenly country, the city which God has prepared for us.

Jesus says, “Be ready for action”— ready to go wherever God may lead you.”

That is what being people of faith is about

The exemplars of faith whom the author of Hebrews sets before us took God at his word when he made promises for the future.

We too, as the new wandering people of God, are to take God's promises made to us in Christ, — made to us in the new covenant sealed by Christ's death and resurrection — as the strength for our pilgrimage. We are to take God's promises as the hope, which sustains us on our life's journey made in the company of God.

“Do not be afraid little flock,” Jesus says, “for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”

Amen.