

Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for. 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. By faith Abraham, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. By his faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that comes by faith. 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. 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. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

By faith Abraham, even though he was past age—and Sara herself was barren—was enabled to become a father because he considered him faithful who had made the promise. 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.

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. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. 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.

A lot has been written about the functions of the left and right sides of the brain. As you see on your bulletin cover, people who function primarily out of the left side of their brain are logical, sequential, rational, analytical, and objective while people who function primarily out of the right side of their brains are random, intuitive, holistic, synthesizing, and subjective. And while we are inclined to utilize one side of our brain more than we do the other, there are always opportunities to increase our brain function by developing attributes associated with the less dominant side of our brain. That is what I am attempting to do this morning because last week someone said that our church is a “right brain” church. Initially I took exception to the comment—I like to think of us as a church for all people and all brains—but as I've thought about it this past week, I have to admit that the person was right—at least when it comes to the sermons. I'm about as right brain as they come. While I have a healthy appreciation for the left brain folks, I even went so far as to marry one, I myself am not inclined toward the left brain qualities of being analytical, logical, objective, or sequential. And what amazes me is that those of you who are left brained stick around here week after week enduring intuitive, touchy-feely, warm and fuzzy, where's-she-going-with-this, you're-worried-that-it's-going-to-end-with-a-stirring- rendition-of-Kum-bay-yah sermons. Left-brainers, you are to be commended for your attendance at worship and I thank you for the humbling reminder that our church is more about the people than it is about the preaching—thank you Jesus.

And so, taking all of this into consideration, I thought I would attempt to preach a sermon this morning that is more analytical, logical, objective, and sequential than usual. But what is obvious is that there is a certain amount of illogical-ness that has to be accepted when it comes to faith because “faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.” In our postmodern, scientific, rational culture it doesn't make sense to be sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see and yet doing so is an essential “first step” for God's people. And though the world around us points us away from such a seemingly senseless endeavor, the world of scripture, the world of faith, compels us to do nothing else.

Thankfully, we're not alone in our attempts to live faithful lives—lives in which we are able “to be sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.” As the people of God, we have a rich history of folks who took that initial leap of faith and because of their example, we, too, can move forward in faith. This is the message that the author of today's scripture is sharing with the Hebrews.

Now, in an attempt to meet my goal of using more of my left brain, let's begin to analyze this letter by setting it in its original context. The Hebrews, to whom this letter was written, were most likely a group of second-generation Christians, meaning they had grown up as Christians and were familiar with the texts of the Old Testament and the stories of Jesus. They had been worshipping together for some time and were located in the Mediterranean region, possibly Rome. The author of the letter is well-acquainted with the congregation and knows that they are going through a time of crisis. They are in crisis because their faith is waning and their service is growing lax because they are disillusioned with their faith. They had been raised to believe that the return of Jesus was imminent—that it would happen anytime—and yet it wasn't happening. Some of their

former members had even died and still no Jesus. This was a crisis of faith, it was not what they had signed on for and the author of this letter is writing to support them in the midst of their struggles, comfort them with reminders of God's past actions, and exhort them to continue to love and serve in the name of God.

In the portion of the letter that I read this morning, the author focuses on providing the Hebrews with words of encouragement. He reminds them that though they have not yet seen Jesus, "faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see." And then, in the fashion of a geometry proof, he lays out his argument, citing evidence in the form of examples of people with whom they would have been familiar—examples from the Old Testament of Abel, Enoch, Noah and Abraham—especially Abraham, of whom the author writes . . .

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The author provides the Hebrews with examples of folks who, like them, struggled in their faith and wondered about God and were uncomfortable with their choices and were not finding faith to be what they had expected faith to be—and yet God provided them, God was there—God made their hopes possible and was present with them, though God often went unseen. The author assures the Hebrews that what was true for Abel, Enoch, Noah, and Abraham will be true for them as well. In the chapter previous to this one, the author reminds the Hebrews of the covenant that God made with God's people, that God will be their God and they will be God's people. The author reminds the Hebrews that they are God's people, chosen and beloved, therefore, they can trust God to care for them as God has cared for those who have gone before them—as God cared for Abel, Enoch, Noah, and Abraham.

The Hebrews are God's people and we are God's people and the author of Hebrews provides evidence to God's people of God's work in the world **ergo**, this letter, written to the people of God, provides evidence of God's work in the world not just to the Hebrews but also to us as we, too, are God's people. BUT, we also have the advantage of 2000 more years of history in which there are infinite examples of God's care for God's people. And while I could easily talk about Martin Luther, Mother Theresa, or Dorothy Day, we don't need to go that far. I only have to go as far as the faces in front of me—your faces—to find stories about times when faith was shaken—times when you felt like the Hebrews—wondering where Jesus was as you struggled with doubt and questions. You too have been in crisis, and there's a good chance that some of you are in crisis even now. And the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ is that though you may not be able to see Jesus, and though you may not be feeling God's presence in your life, God is there. God is always there. We have proof of it. Not the kind of proof upon which scientists rely—but the kind of proof upon which our lives rely. The proof that God is God and we are the people of God and that with God, all things are possible.

Your presence here this morning proves that on some level, you know this. You know that you are a child of God, disciple of Christ, and member of the church. You know that you are chosen and beloved. Otherwise, it wouldn't make any sense for you to have gotten yourself up out of bed (especially after a night of interrupted sleep due to some of the loudest thunder I've ever heard in my life), into some clothes, out of the house, into the car, and back out of the car to walk through the doors today. That's the initial step—that's that illogical leap of faith that ushers us into a whole new world. And while we may still doubt and be in crisis and wonder and question and find ourselves in the same boat with the Hebrews, we, like they, are children of God and can rest safely in the knowledge that "faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see." Thanks be to God.