



“Faith is the assurance of things hoped for...the conviction of things not seen.” This is one of the most frequently quoted verses from the Bible. And it remains meaningful for contemporary congregations.

Immediately before this verse, Hebrews chapter 10 concludes with a reminder that believers are “among those who have faith and so are saved.” The epistle to the Hebrews reminds us about the faith of Israel, the faith of the ancients, our ancestors in faith. They believed and were confident of what they hoped for. This passage encourages us to do the same.

When we cannot see the future, much less fathom what God may be doing in our life, our faith provides hope. Thus, faith is the reality of things hoped for – that is, *in faith*, the believer already anticipates the outcome (the reality) of what is believed. Faith is the proof of things not seen. In our faith, we move towards the reality of God’s presence in our life even though that presence is beyond our recognition or outward demonstration most of the time.

All of us gaze toward the heavens and wonder. We marvel at the night sky and what we can see but also what we cannot fathom. The untold mysteries of the

world – as well as the movements of God that we do not understand -- constantly surprise and challenge us.

Scientists, physicists, astronomers, cannot see everything in the universe or in chemical reactions,

nevertheless, something happens,

something changes,

new matter appears,

new stars are born,

new planets are found.

Today's science news is full of wonderful new discoveries. Earlier this month, physicists detected a new particle, a quark, after collisions of protons at the Haddon Collider in Switzerland. This is where they smash atoms (made up of neutrons, protons and electrons) to see if there are other particles, other matter, that we do not know about. The scientists are trying to figure out how the world exists, how our planet operates, and maybe, how God made it all happen.

Humans also study relationships, personalities, social and psychosocial behavior to see how humans behave and live in the world. In the world of faith, we do not understand everything that happens in our lives, with loved ones or with others. Yet, something happens when we believe in God:

something changes,

**broken, downtrodden people are saved,
lives of sorrow are turned to joy,
unforgivable sins are forgiven,
lives are transformed and
new lives are created.**

And the only answer we have is, “We believed! Praise God!”

That’s not good enough for some in our world, but it was good enough for our ancestors in faith. Faith has stood the test of time and God still provides. Are we living in an age of faith? I certainly believe we are but that’s because pastors know there are few items more critical than the faith of our people. It is by God’s grace, through faith, that we receive salvation. Faith in God is what keeps our people going in the face of life’s challenges.

The Apostle Paul used the Greek word, *pistis*, for faith throughout his writings, 35 times in Romans alone. As pastors we come alongside our people who hope for things, yearn for things, and, *in faith*, ask God for that which they hope. Sometimes their prayers are answered. Sometimes, they are still waiting for an answer from God.

As we saw in the Hebrews scripture, *faith is intertwined with hope*. And this is what we find in our Romans passage from chapter 5. In-between our faith and our hopes are those times in life we would rather avoid; difficulties, trials,

hardships and disappointments, poverty, stress, afflictions, curses, misfortune, bad luck and you name it.

I remember an old saying, “If it weren’t for bad luck, I’d have no luck at all.” Ever feel like that?

The Apostle is stating that in the midst of a world crashing down around us, we can still find peace with God, through Jesus Christ. This is faith! This is what we do as Christians: Persevering, hoping, hanging in there, holding on for dear life because we believe in a God of salvation.

In this passage, the phrase, “hope does not disappoint us” is not accurately translated from the Greek. “Disappoint” properly rendered means “disgrace” or “put to shame.” In other words, the hope we maintain through our faith, does not disgrace us, does not bring shame upon us. When the New Testament was written, the common culture was to build up honor among the community -- not do anything that would bring shame onto the community.

The Apostle is writing to the Roman church. It was being shamed and disgraced by the rulers of Rome, but also by some of the behavior of its members. The community is, in essence, on trial. Perhaps for our community at Valley Presbyterian Church, it seems like we’ve been on trial. Not surprisingly we get discouraged. Is God is displeased with us? No matter what others may say about

this church or our faith community, *hope* does not disgrace us; our *hope* does not put us to shame.

The Roman church was vindicated of any shame-making oppression or affliction because of their faithfulness to the one who raised Jesus the Christ from the dead. The results were peace with God and access to the grace of God in which they stood. That's our results too. We are standing in grace! God gifts us, the church family at Valley Presbyterian Church, – we are filled with divine favor and love. We stand in God's grace through our faith. Wherever we stand, we are under God's grace.

As we better understand ourselves and our relationship to God, we find no need to hide. We can stand and boast because of our *faith*. Our faith (our endurance and character) and God's love, freely given, are the substance of our *hope*.

When we boast in our hopes, then we boast in the afflictions

we've gone through.

When we boast in our hopes, then we affirm the glory of the

God upon which the church stands – the glory of the God

who raised Jesus Christ from the dead and who

through the power of the Holy Spirit has

poured love into the church, into this church.

Boasting does not seem like the right thing to do. We weren't raised that way, but it is right thing for us to do as a church community. It restores the honor bestowed upon the church by the God of heaven and earth. **We stand in grace and we boast**, even about our afflictions. They are a sign, not of the displeasure of God, but of the faithfulness of God's beloved people. Such a stance is based on *hope*, a *hope* that emerges out of mutual suffering. And that *hope* built upon patience and character will not shame us, despite every attempt by the world to afflict or oppress us.

As we read further into Hebrews, chapter 11, we come across example after example of those who persevered in the belief that God had given them life and a mission to accomplish. Even amid suffering, Abraham and Sarah, Moses, Noah, Rahab and countless others trusted that life with God and with God's people was worth more than all the world could offer.

The voices of those who have gone before us, who are alive in God, still speak to us. Like a huge crowd in a stadium, the cloud of witnesses shout to us, **"Go team! Stay on course! Pass the baton of faith. Hold fast! You can do it!"**

In our faithfulness to God, we discover God's faithfulness to our ancestors and also to us. Our faithful lives here at Valley are not a matter of earning God's love, but of discovering God's faithfulness in loving us always. This is good news for the people of God. Let us stand in God's grace! Amen.

