

Where is Your Faith Taking You?

Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16

August 12, 2007

After Noah built the ark, the animals started to board the ship two by two. Pair after pair of animals passed by Noah, heading up the ramp into the ship. Finally a lone hippo waddled up and Noah asked him where his mate was. "I was hoping to meet her on the cruise!" the hippo replied. Now that's faith.

How's your faith today? Have you ever thought about it?

I am old enough to remember elevators when they had real live operators in them. You got into them, told the operator which floor you wanted, and were then taken directly to your destination.

You may remember that I have talked about Ken Vance on more than one occasion. He has been a pastor/pilot/missionary in Africa for several decades now. Ken and I were in the same License to Preach class of 1972.

License to Preach School was the first step on the approximately ten year journey to ordination. Anyway, we stayed in a dorm down on the campus of DePauw University in Greencastle. The dorms were three or four stories tall and had elevators. Somehow, Ken discovered how to get on top of the elevator cars and ride them up to the attic.

In the attic, he found the elevator controls and figured out how to work them. If someone got on the elevator on the first floor and pushed the button for the second floor, Ken could send them straight to the third floor. If someone was on the third floor and wanted to go down to the second floor, Ken could send them directly to the first floor. The rest of us gave him the nickname "Otis" after the name of the elevator company.

When I am visiting someone on the seventh floor at Parkview Hospital, I can pretty much guarantee that the elevator will be jam-packed with people, some of whom will get off on every floor. That is why I walk up the steps sometimes. Some of you have had me walk into your rooms out of breath because I've taken the stairs, but I can walk them quicker than I can wait for the elevator to stop at every floor.

The News Corp Building in New York City has recently installed what they are calling "destination elevators." This is my understanding of how they work. Let's say for example, that you want to go to the seventh floor. Before you get on the elevator, you go to a computer station and type in the number 7. Your request will then be analyzed and will be compared with the traffic demands at that time. The computer also calculates the best route for each elevator car based on where each passenger is going. After this happens in a split second, you are directed to the appropriate elevator which takes you to your desired floor much faster than with old elevators.

The upside for this is that there is a 20-30 percent reduction in the time you spend waiting for or in elevators. But you have to be careful. If you just walk into the building and jump on the first elevator that has its door open, you may not be able to get to where you want to go.

So in a system like this, you have to trust your elevator to get you to the place you intend to go. Faith in God works the same way. You just have to make a choice to get on board and then trust the outcome.

I guess that we have to begin by coming to some sort of a definition of faith. What is faith, anyway? The writer of Hebrews opens up chapter eleven with a definition of faith that is sort of abstract. The New Revised Standard Version contains the traditional language. "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." There is something incredibly poetic and comforting in those words.

But I actually like the way THE MESSAGE puts it better. "The fundamental fact of existence is that this trust in God, this faith, is the firm foundation under everything that makes life worth living."

There was a nun who was working at an agency that provided home health care. She was on her way to visit one of her clients one day when she ran out of gas. She walked to the nearest gas station and asked to borrow a can with just enough gas to start her car so she could drive it to the station for a fill up. The attendant said that he was sorry, but he had just loaned out the only gas can he had.

The nun, ever resourceful, went back to her car and retrieved a bed pan. She then walked back to the gas station, filled the bedpan with gas, and carried it back to her car. As she was pouring the contents of the bed pan into her gas tank, two guys walked by. After watching her, one of them said to the other, "Now that is what I call faith."

The eleventh chapter of Hebrews contains a whole long laundry list of people who, with a willing heart and a trusting spirit, stepped into God's faith elevator, knowing that when they arrived at their destination, they would have only God upon whom to rely. They were driven, not by self-interest, but by the assurance and conviction of faith. The men and women of the Old Testament mentioned in Hebrews made the conscious choice to trust God in all things, and put themselves into God's hands despite the promise of an unknown future.

When you search the Scriptures for examples of faith, you can find instances of numerous people who time and time again stepped out in their faith and trusted God. But probably the most famous or most known example is that of Abraham. You remember the story.

Abraham was over there in Mesopotamia settling in to enjoy his retirement. But God spoke to him one day, telling him to pack up everything and set out on a journey. I know

Abraham was a little curious – anybody would be – but God told him simply to go and wait to receive the destination later.

The last time I was on a big city bus was when I was nineteen years old and visiting Denver for the first time. So, I'm not an expert on public transportation, but I read an interesting story the other day. This fellow was on a bus in San Francisco. When he came to his stop, he walked to the back door, but it wouldn't open. He yelled up toward the front of the bus "back door" in order to get the attention of the driver. Then several people told him that he had to step down a step and the door would open automatically. Sometimes, I think that there are a lot of doors that don't open for people because they don't take that first step out or that first step down.

I can't imagine being Abraham and Sarah because I don't know how I would have reacted to the news that God was sending us on a journey with no specified destination or duration. I tend to be too cautious and too curious. I need to know where I am going and how I'm going to get there. I don't always trust enough.

Abraham and his wife Sarah were told that they would become the parents of a great nation. They laughed a little at first and didn't quite believe God. They were, after all, far beyond the normal child-bearing years. Yet they trusted. That faith allowed these two people who were so very close to death's door, to become the patriarch and matriarch of descendants too numerous to count.

As great as they were, Abraham and Sarah were not immortal. They died and were buried in the ground as is the lot of all human beings in this world. Yet, the author of Hebrews says that they died still believing. They died still having faith. They died still trusting God in everything. Their faithfulness proved to God that they were looking for their true home, their heavenly home, the heavenly city in which they would take up residence.

I have never been to a Texas A & M football game. Not even sure that I've seen one on television. So this story doesn't come from first-hand experience. But my understanding is that the students of Texas A & M stand during the whole football game. Apparently the tradition goes back to 1922. The Aggies were having a great season. They were headed to the championship of the Southwest Conference. In January, they went to Dallas for the Dixie Classic. A basketball player named E. King Gill went along to scout the game from the stands.

But the team was hit hard with injuries. By the end of the first half, the coach wasn't sure that he would have 11 healthy players to put on the field. This was a time in history when football players played both ways – offense AND defense. The coach looked up in the stands and waved for E. King Gill to come down to the field.

He brought Gill down to the field and had him put on a jersey. The story goes that Gill stood there during the entire second half, so that if they didn't have 11 men to put on the field, he would be ready to play. He stood there, the whole second half, saying, "Coach, if

you need me, I'm ready to play." Since that time, every student at Texas A & M stands during the entire game to support the team and to say, "Coach, if you need me, I'm ready to play."

Abraham and Sarah were on the sidelines ready to play. When God called them in, they were ready and didn't hesitate.

One of the ways that men and women are different is seen in the ways that we pick out Hallmark cards for special occasions. I bet that many men are like me. If I need a card, I walk into the Hallmark store and within 3 minutes, I have it, have paid for it, and have walked out of the store. Not so with my wife. It takes her forever to pick out a card. I hate to go card shopping with her.

There was a young man in love, as many young men are. He went into a card shop one day looking for just the right card for his girlfriend. Since he was a fairly normal guy who wasn't all that sentimental and didn't express his feelings very well, he asked the clerk for help in picking out just the right card. She picked out the best-selling card and gave it to the young manIt said simply, "To the only girl I have ever loved." The young man said, "Terrific! Wonderful! I'll take six of those!"

This was a guy who had commitment issues. Abraham and Sarah wouldn't have understood that. They were committed to God above all else. They were led into the unknown future by their faith.

I quite frankly, don't know how to get through each day without faith in God. You see, whenever I try to have faith in other things, I'm always let down. My friends sometimes let me down. My government frequently lets me down. My education often lets me down when I trust in it to get me through tough spots because I somehow think that a diploma on the wall makes me wise. My planning for the future lets me down because things don't always go as I imagine.

I am left with God. It is my faith in God that leads me into the future. Now this is just me, but without that faith, I couldn't get up in the morning. Without that faith, I would be wandering around listlessly and aimlessly.

Where is your faith taking you? Is it leading you into a fuller and richer commitment and trust in God? Is it leading you to the place where you can place your whole life into the hands of God? Is your faith leading you to a place where you are able to go through life not thinking about what's in it for you, but concentrating on God's purpose and presence. Where is your faith taking you?