"IT'S ALL ABOUT TRUST"

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Hebrews 11:1-40 17 March, 2013

It is wonderful to be home again sleeping in my own bed. In the last three weeks I slept in nine different beds and interacted with 16 Churches. Time and time again I was asked to give two messages to this Church. **First**, they all wanted to send you greetings and so I bring you greetings from:

St. Hilda's Church, Oakville, Ont. CELEBRATION CHURCH, BARRIE, ONT. CHURCH OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD, ST. CATHARINES, ONT. St. George's Church, Lowville, Ont. CHURCH OF THE EPIPHANY, HAMILTON, ONT. St. Chad, Toronto, Ont. CHURCH OF THE WAY, WASAGA BEACH, ONT. Church of the Messiah, Toronto, Ont. St. Aidan's Church, Windsor, Ont. CORNERSTONE CHURCH, SARNIA, ONT. FAITH ANGLICAN CHURCH, EMBRUN, ONT. BLACKBURN HAMLET COMMUNITY CHURCH, OTTAWA, ONT. St. Peter and St. Paul, Ottawa, Ont. ETERNAL HOPE, CARLETON PLACE, ONT. Church of the Messiah, Ottawa, Ont. St. Luke's, Pembroke, Ont.

The **Second** thing they wanted me to do was to convey their deep appreciation to all of you as I go off to do this work. The list of Churches I just named should make us realize that we are becoming a large family and before this month is over, we will be adding at least two more Churches to our Diocese. Last Sunday Paul Donison, the Rector of St. Peter's and St. Paul's, prayed this prayer: "Father, we give you thanks for the Church of Our Lord who are willing to release one of their senior clergy to do this work for the good of the whole body of the ANiC family." I return today and give thanks

to Peter, Richard and the Wardens for picking up the burden of caring for the Church during Rod's and my absence. It is very unlikely that Rod and I will ever be away at the same time again.

This morning we are back in the book of Hebrews and we are going to look at Chapter 11 and I have entitled the Sermon: "It is all about Trust." Trust and Faith go hand in hand. But in order to understand Chapter 11, I have to go back to a few verses in Chapter 10 and go forward and borrow two verses from Chapter 12. "Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you stood your ground in a great contest in the face of suffering. Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. You sympathized with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions. So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. (Heb 10:32-35) Carrying on to verse 39, the Preacher says: "But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved." (39) To understand the Preacher's point we need to remind ourselves that this letter is written to Jewish Christians. These are Christians who have suffered through insults, persecution, the loss of jobs and property. But what the Preacher is trying to do is prepare them for the future possibility of martyrdom. He is not trying to frighten them, but that is exactly what is going to happen to this young Church. Under the Emperor Claudius there had been imprisonment and banishment from Rome, but under Nero there were executions. At one time these Jewish Christians had stood firm for the name of Jesus, now they appear to be timid and willing to compromise. At one time they had regarded their property as expendable, but now they are emotionally unprepared to risk the loss of property and life. The preacher implores them not to draw back-why? Because if they do, there is no doubt that it will lead to their destruction and loss. They have several choices: **ruin** in this world or **vindication** in the next; eternal **destruction** or everlasting salvation; death in this life or eternal life in the Resurrection to come. We may think these verses do not apply to us, but they do. Today in places like Pakistan, Iraq, Iran, Egypt, Sudan, Russia, China and other places too numerous to mention, persecution, loss of jobs, possessions and lives are for many a daily occurrence. Many in the Western world think we will escape this. We (note the emphasis on we) **WE** will not escape. Many in the Western world think that this persecution will pass us by and we will just wait until that glorious day of the Lord's return. The present generation of believers has become soft and we live with the 'expectation' that because we live in the West we will not face the trials and tribulations that will come in this world. We will-no not all of us, some will go home to glory before the Day of Judgment comes, but if we don't; how will we prepare ourselves for what Jesus and the Prophets warned us will come to pass? Admittedly there is currently some persecution taking place in the West, but there would be much more if Bishops and Pastors were not so quick to compromise 'on the Gospel that has been handed down through the Saints.' I don't say these things to frighten you; but to 'warn', to 'encourage' but most of all to 'remind' the saints that we are not settlers, as it says in verse 13, we are foreigners and

strangers living on this earth. This is not our final destination and we are not to live as if it is. Many have forgotten or no longer believe that this world with all its sports, arts, entertainment, technological advances and culture is still the same world that rejected and shamelessly crucified the Christ. So in chapter 10, the Word of the Lord today is from verse 38 and I will use the King James translation: "Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my **soul will have no pleasure in him."** God takes no pleasure in those who treat Him with such disregard. Many live with no faith in God who created the world with order. Many live with no faith in God who provides for the children of His love. Many live with no faith in God who loves justice and hates lawlessness. Many live with no faith in God who provides a way, the **only** way, into the very sanctuary of His presence. Living with no faith does not please God. As a result, these people call into question the very character of God and try to play God themselves. You see desire for God is the root of faith; without a hunger for God, His very existence is a matter of indifference.

That brings us to Hebrews Chapter 11. Our world loves trophies and has numerous halls of fame. We honour those we consider exceptional football, hockey or baseball players. We also hand out Gold plated Statues and awards to actors for movies, shows or entertainment that we deem worthy. There is a major difference between being judged a success by the world and considered a success by God. Those that God considers a success will be found in His very own HALL OF FAME! The criterion to enter God's Hall of Fame is one thing and one thing only. That is verse one of Chapter

11: "Now FAITH is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see." How important is FAITH to this preacher? It is so important that he mentions it 27 times in those 40 verses of Scripture. Why does God repeat Himself in Scripture, because He wants us to get the message! If God repeats something 27 times in one chapter, we should definitely sit up and take notice.

Many people are confused about 'FAITH.' I am going to tell you what it is isn't and then I will tell you what it is. Faith is NOT a blind leap into the dark. FAITH is NOT positive or wishful thinking. Faith is **NOT** asking God to do whatever **we** want. What we want; may not in fact be part of God's plan for our life or for the life of the person for whom we are praying. Faith is **NOT** manipulating God, nor is it magic. During the second world-war millions of people were praying for the release from prison of the German Pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer. It didn't happen, in fact, he was murdered two days before the Americans liberated Flossenburg Camp. I have to believe that it was God's plan for Dietrich Bonhoeffer to die as a martyr for the sake of the Gospel. In prison Bonheoffer's focus was not on himself, but on the future, he said: "The ultimate responsible question is not how can I heroically make the best of a bad situation, but rather how the coming generation can be enabled to live." If it took his death for this to happen, then he would willingly die for the Glory of God! If Jesus tarries, what will the cost be for this generation if the *next* generation can be enabled to live for the sake of the Gospel?

What is **FAITH**? The Preacher's definition is: "Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do

not see." Every Sunday we say that we believe in the Resurrection. We also say that we believe that Jesus will come again. What is that belief based on? It is not based on a leap of faith or wishful thinking. NO, it is faith based on the PROMISES OF GOD! As Christians that is what we are called to rest in. Biblical Faith tells us there is a reality which we cannot see. Faith means that as we go through life, we are called to keep our eyes on God who controls the circumstances-not on the circumstances themselves. Paul in 2 Corinthians says: "We live by faith, not by sight." In 2nd Timothy Paul says: "I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day." (1:12) There are two ways to live in this world. The most common way is to live by our senses, to base our whole life on what we can see, feel and touch. Those who live like this are merely drifting through life storing up treasures for others to enjoy. The other way is the road less travelled on that road we live by faith; and we base our lives primarily and ultimately on what we cannot see, feel and touch. This morning we cannot see Jesus Christ standing in our midst. But we know His promise: "That where two or three are gathered together in my name, I am in your midst." (Mt 18:20) Although we cannot see Him with our eyes, we know by faith in His promises that He is here. Sunday after Sunday when we celebrate the Eucharist, we hear these words: "With angels and archangels and all the company of heaven, we laud and magnify His glorious name when we sing together: "Holy, Holy, Holy, the whole earth is full of His glory." We don't see the angels or archangels or the company of saints, but by His word, we know they are here in the invisible realm. And

because we believe that, God says in verse six that He is pleased with us. "And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him." All these people listed in Hebrews 11, are people who pleased God. Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Moses' parents, the Israelites who passed through the Red Sea, the soldiers who marched around Jericho, Rahab, Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, the Prophets and other names that only God alone knows. Why these saints? They all lived to please God. By **FAITH**, Abel's sacrifice was a sacrifice of worship. (4) He offered to God the very best he had and Cain offered his leftovers. By **FAITH**, Enoch lived in one of the darkest periods of history just prior to God destroying the earth because of man's evil. He pleased God so much that God took him before he could taste death. (6) When warned of things not yet seen, by FAITH, Noah, believed God when God said that He was going to destroy the earth by water. (7) By FAITH Abraham left the comfort of his home to live in tents in the Promised Land as did Isaac and Jacob. By FAITH, he looked forward to the city whose foundations and architect was God. (8) Even though both Abraham and Sarah laughed when God said that they would have a child in the winter of their lives, by **FAITH**, they waited over 25 years, but they believed that God was able. (10-11) By **FAITH**, Abraham who God referred to as 'HIS FRIEND' was willing to sacrifice his Son, because he believed that 'his friend GOD' was able to even raise the dead. (17-19) By **FAITH**, Joseph who knew that God's people would be enslaved for 400 years left instructions at his death that

when God delivered His people in 430 years, they were to carry his bones out of Egypt and bury them in the Promised Land. By **FAITH**, Moses' parents knew there was something special about their son and they hid him. By FAITH, Moses turned away from the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life and left Egypt. By FAITH, under God's instructions, he returned to Egypt to rescue God's people. By **FAITH**, he kept the Passover, and led Israel through the Red Sea. By **FAITH**, Joshua led the Israelites across the Jordan River and then told them to march around Jericho for seven days and God would make it fall. (39) Again and again, by FAITH, God has led His people. What does He say in verse 38: 'the world was not worthy of them..." and in verse 39: "they were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised..." Think of how faithful these people were that they carried on their lives without seeing the story come to its proper conclusion. They didn't receive the promise, because the promise only came true when Jesus the Messiah came into this world.

I live for the return of Christ! Will He come back in my lifetime? I don't know, but I am determined to live as if He will. I try to live my life as if Jesus died yesterday, rose today and is coming tomorrow! Everything that was in God's time table to do has been done. God selected a people for Himself. He rescued them from bondage. He gave them the Law. He established the nation of Israel. When they fell into sin and turned their back on Him, he scattered them to places all over the globe. That nation has now been restored. God sent His Son into the world to redeem the world and He has established His Church as His instrument of Grace to tell others the Good News of

Christ. That Gospel is being proclaimed all over the world. According to Biblical records, all that had to take place has taken place and all we are waiting for is Jesus to **return** in power and glory. That is why I live my live my life as if Jesus **died** yesterday; **rose** today and is **coming** tomorrow. Maybe I will taste death before He comes. If I do, I want to die with the words of the good thief on my lips: "**Jesus**, **Remember Me**, **when you come into your Kingdom.**" (Lk 23:42) Maybe I will be required to suffer for His name and by His Grace and by **FAITH**, I will not shrink back or be found wanting. I want to be faithful and I imagine that all of us want to be faithful. We would all like **BY FAITH** to hold firm to the very end.

Some of you may say that you do not have that kind of **FAITH**. If only you had that kind of faith, then everything would be all right. **FAITH** is **NOT** a magic bullet. But this morning God will grant this Gift of Faith to those who genuinely want to receive it. I want you to leave here today knowing that the Holy Spirit wants you to have this gift. It is yours but I am not going to pray to ask God for you to receive it. Instead, I am going to give you the promise of God and so I invite you to turn in your Bibles to Romans chapter 10. Look down at verses 9-10: "That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved." You see, God takes us at OUR word. My heart believes but it is my mouth that speaks. Jesus told us that "by our words we will be acquitted, and by words, we will be condemned." (Mt 12:37) So when I am able to profess with my lips that Jesus Christ is Lord,

and I live my life in that manner, God takes me at **my** word. In turn He invites us to take Him at His word. The Psalmist wrote: "I bow down toward your Holy Temple and give thanks to your name for your steadfast love and faithfulness, for you have exalted above all things, your name and your word." (Ps 138:2b) God wants us to believe His word and this morning, I will show how simple it is to receive the gift of faith. Look at verse 17: "Faith comes from hearing and hearing through the word of Christ." You may wonder why you are spiritually dry, or why you are not growing spiritually, or why your prayers seem to go unanswered or why you are blown here and there and your faith is more *feeling* based than **FAITH** based. It is simply because you are **NOT** taking God at His word. When we begin to shrink back from God, the first thing we do is cast aside His word. It actually is the last thing we should do, because it is that WORD and that WORD alone which builds and sustains our faith. What happens when we shrink back? It is sad to say: "We displease God."

In closing, I told you earlier I was going to borrow two verses from Hebrews chapter 12-I am not going to speak to them, I am going to let them stand alone. In fact, let us recite them aloud to one another: "Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." (12:1-2)