

## **Sister church in Velasco, Cuba**

### **Statements of faith greater than statement of concerns**

I have continued to think about the correspondence from our sister church in Velasco, Cuba that I shared during our prayer time last week. There was a sharing in the concerns within their country and community...about the drought, about covid, about leadership, but within the statements of concern were strong statements of faith, we could even say, statements of faith that were greater than their concerns, knowing that God had cared for them and would care for them, that God had protected some from getting sick while taking care of the sick, that God was opening the way for them to begin meeting in person again.

## **Zambia building**

### **Confidence in something hoped for and assurance in something they did not see**

On this World Communion Sunday I think about our UM sisters and brothers in Zambia, specifically remembering pictures I would see of a church being built, step by step, over time. The pastor led the church in this way because they had a clear message from God to build. The money didn't come in all at once, not a possibility for them so they began building, putting their faith into action as they had confidence in what they hoped for and assurance in something they did not see. Life had taught them they could have hope, even when it might have seemed hopeless to get a church built and God had proven before that they could have assurance in Him.

When I first began going on mission trips, whether to Zambia, Cuba or within the states to places like Pahokey and Atlanta and mountainous areas in North Carolina, I had this mentally that I was going to do good, to help, to offer a service that was needed, to take hope. It did not take long before God changed my perspective. It was like He was hitting me over the head with a 2x4, to come down off my high horse. In those experiences the people began changing me, doing good for me, helping me out, offering me a service, as they shared their stories, their lives, their faith with me. I came to learn more fully about what it meant to have confidence in what was hoped for and assurance in something that was not seen in that moment.

## **Believe it when you see it or believe it when you do not see?**

The world tells us to believe it when we see it, but the author of Hebrews offers us another alternative, to believe it when we do not see it. To have faith that God is up to something, that God can do the impossible, that God can make a way when there is no way, that God has our best interest in mind and that God's Kingdom actually can come on earth as it is in heaven. We have a choice here. Will we believe it when we see it or will we have confidence in what we hope for and assurance in what we do not see?

In case we are struggling with taking choice B, the author of Hebrews wrote a whole chapter about people in the Old Testament that took that option and watched what God said and promised and offered as hope, come to fruition.

## **Off the wall things happened because of God**

**Ark built**

**Walls fell down**

**Walked across Red Sea**

**Shut mouths of lions**

Some off the wall, even ridiculous things happened because God made them possible. In chapter 11 it mentions that Noah built an ark, something he had never done before and as far as he could see and know, was not needed. The walls of Jericho fell after the people marched around it 7 days. What's the correlation there? The Israelites walked across the Red Sea, while the Egyptians drowned when they tried. The chapter tells that the mouths of lions were shut. And if the events were not strange enough and impossible things made possible, lets look at the list of names mentioned in this great list of heroes. They were basically ordinary people. And in the scriptures, we see that some of them had spotty pasts, who had been the talk of the town. There wasn't a one of them that had always gotten it right. What I notice is the fact that there was no mold, no profile with all of them having certain lists of characteristics and abilities. The only thing they had in common was a willing spirit to have confidence in something hoped for and assurance of something not yet seen.

## **Heroes of the faith**

**Ordinary people**

**Some had pasts**

**No mold or profile**

**Had a willing spirit**

And now we could write a whole chapter on people in the New Testament, right? There was Mary who was visited by an angel, who told her she was going to give birth to a son, Jesus, Son of the Most High and she responded by saying Here I am, because she believed what the angel said when He told her, nothing is impossible with God. And what about Peter, who usually stuck his foot in his mouth. On the day of Pentecost, with the coming of the Holy Spirit, without a seminary class on homiletics, he preached a sermon to a crowd and about 3000 were added to their number. And Paul, who was once a persecutor of Christians, was blinded on the road to Damascus. Three days later the scales fell off of his eyes as Ananias laid his hands upon Paul and he became the greatest missionary ever.

## **Who meets under the arbor?**

And then another chapter could be written about the life of this church that first began meeting in Beulah and one day moved to the corner of Newell and Boyd, under the arbor.

## **People who have confidence in what they hoped for and assurance in what they could not see, in the moment.**

Who meets under the arbor...people who had confidence in what they hoped for and assurance in what they could not see in that moment but what they knew God was up to. Things that we see today...a sanctuary, fellowship hall, SS class, office building, basketball court, were things unseen as a group of people sat under the arbor tree, but they chose to believe and to have faith in what God was going to do, in what they hoped would happen. And so here we are today, with a legacy that has been given to us to live out.

### **Hebrews 12:1-2**

“**12** Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely,<sup>[a]</sup> and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us,<sup>2</sup> looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of<sup>[b]</sup> the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.”

So, I say, let's do it. Let's lay aside every weight...every excuse, every insecurity, every objection we can come up with and let's not forget the sin too. All it does is create a barrier and separation between us and God and with one another. So, lay aside the weight of I'm too young or I'm too old or I don't have enough education or experience or money, or I don't think I can do that, I've never done it before and the reality is, we also get concerned with what others will think. Or maybe your even thinking you don't have enough faith.

### **Matthew 17:20**

Hear these words from Jesus in Matthew 17:20, “Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.” You don't have to believe in your age or education status or money in the bank account. God already knows all that. Believe in Him, in the pioneer and perfecter of faith.

### **Believe in Him, the pioneer and perfecter of faith**

So I say with the author of Hebrews, lay it all aside, cause if we are carrying around all that baggage, we can't run the race set before us. So let's do it...and I don't mean for you to go run that race alone, let's do it together...all of us united together, with the great cloud of witnesses cheering us on, encouraging us, giving us strength and courage...with our eyes fixed upon Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith...Jesus who as the pioneer got this whole thing started, was the instigator and trailblazer. Let's look to Him and keep our eyes from going this way and that way, but set on the course He has mapped out for us, having confidence in what we hope for and assurance of things we have not seen, yet.

### **Everything we see was at one point unseen**

Basically everything we see, was at one point unseen. In the beginning, it was dark and void, but now there is light and life...all of creation springing forth from God's sight, from God making possible, what was at one point, impossible and unknown. And along the way as God continued to create, He offered people the opportunity to go on a pilgrimage with Him, a journey of faith and trust and hope. And through those people, some of which we have mentioned in worship today, the invisible work of God became visible.

**It is in the life of one who trusts God and is willing to go on the journey, that the invisible becomes visible.**