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MERIDIAN STREET UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

The Rest of the Story

Hebrews 12:1-3

In the book of Hebrews, Chapter 11, we are told that Noah, Abraham, Moses and many others who have gone before us lived and acted out of faith. "By faith" is the key phrase to the telling of our faith history. Following the recalling of names and faithful actions of our ancestors, we hear these words in the 12th chapter of Hebrews. Read Hebrews 12:1-3.

Prayer

Action motivated by faith is the central theme in chapter 11 of Hebrews. The phrase, "By faith" is at the core of the entire chapter. The declaration is made that faith is hope, trust, confidence, and dependence on the promises of God. Faith is more than belief; faith is action. Faith is an encounter between the Divine and the human, an engagement, an intertwining of spirit that is greater than any one of us is on our own. Our spirituality is connected to our God and to the spirituality of our ancestors. The faith of our ancestors presents itself as offering to God, walking with God, working, risking, trusting, and blessing. Those ancients changed the direction of the world based on their faith. We are reminded that by faith, those who paved the way for us did so in the midst of temptation, threats, and adversity. Their lives, certainly no easier than yours or mine, their encounters with God, like ours, is eternal. Their faith provides the foundation upon which our faith is built.

His is a distinctive voice and the minute you hear it you know that voice belongs to Mr. Paul Harvey. Since 1976, Harvey has been heard on the radio as he delivers "The Rest of the Story" Monday through Saturday. He is known in part for his famous words, "And Now Page 2."

Page 2 for us this morning is the reality, that the names read earlier in the service, those from our extended family of faith at Meridian Street are a continuation of the faith story. They are alive in spirit in our midst and their faithful relationship with God continues to inspire us this day. Our faith story begins with the faith of our ancestors. Page two consists of the stories that you can tell about those beloved from this congregation who have died in the past year. You know their lives and you know that each one of them could add their story of faith to the list in Hebrews 11. "By faith" is also the motivation behind their story. "By faith" is the introduction to their trust, confidence, and dependence upon God.

Page 2 is the continuation of the stories of the faithful. Those faithful who also remained connected to the Divine even in the midst of temptation, threats and adversity.

That word "saints" makes most of us a little nervous. Looking at our own lives, we would not identify ourselves as saints. The faithful have not known perfection. The truth of a saint is not that they are perfect, but that they build a life that consistently turns back to the Divine.

The names we lifted earlier in this service are now a part of the cloud of witnesses that surround us this day. They continue to live in our hearts and memories as we share their stories of faith, as we remember their love and as we acknowledge that they live still.

Each and everyone here has been inspired by someone who has gone before us. We have all known people of faith, who even in the midst of adversity have lived with confidence in the promises of God and have allowed the presence of God to be evident in their daily living. This is a day to remember them and to give thanks. This is a day to allow their faithful living to inspire our faithful living.

He was in grade school when I first met him. He had a serious heart defect and by the time I met him, he had already endured several heart surgeries. Young in years, he had a profound understanding of the power of his faith in God. At the time of his confirmation into the church, that moment in time when as an eighth grader he was going to become a member of the church, he would first need to be baptized. So, I went to his home to discuss the importance of baptism. I was trying to boil down the theology of baptism into a concept that he would easily understand when in fact he began to tell me about his relationship with the Divine. He shared the reality of fighting for his life during his many heart surgeries and the knowledge that he would endure more surgeries. He told me what it meant to trust God, to be dependant upon grace, to know deep within that no matter what the external realities of our living, our hope, our only hope is God.

By faith, that young man chose to be baptized in the love of God, the grace of Jesus Christ, and the power of the Holy Spirit. By faith, he would live through another heart surgery and then miraculously, he would be released into a normal teenage life. He had never had a normal life. Now, he was free to live like other young people his age. He was healthy enough to stay up late, play baseball with passion and enthusiasm, and just hang out and be one of the guys. By faith, he would begin to live his life to the fullest and learn to take risks. He began to taste the joy of living and dreaming of a future. Sadly at the young age of 16, he would die in a freak accident. Because of his faith, he had already lived a life filled with courage, confidence and trust in God.

We have all been inspired by those of faith who have gone before us. We feel the presence of those lives represented by the candles this morning inspiring us again this morning.

And as Paul Harvey would say, “and now, the rest of the story.” You and I are the rest of the story. The history of faith is not over. The story continues. We are spiritually connected to our ancestors in the faith, to those who have gone before us in this very congregation of faith and to each other as we too choose to live by faith. The phrase, “By Faith” continues to be the introduction to the rest of our story. By faith we, too, trust in our God in the midst of temptation, threat and adversity. We, too, live by faith as we offer our lives to our God, as we walk with God, as we work for God, as we risk and bless and trust God. Our words and actions are shaped by our faith as we live dependent upon God.

The rest of the story is that the saints are alive. We stand in communion with those who live eternally and with the disciples of Christ who continue to live the faith.

By faith, Meridian Street, it is time to take risks. By faith, we will not only be open to all who would enter our doors, but we will go out of these doors and share our faith with others. By faith, we will dream new dreams, see new visions, reach out with new energy. By faith we will gratefully receive the days we are given and by faith we will live out our time together with passion and joy. By faith, we will let love rule our hearts, compassion set our course and courage motivate our actions. We will not be afraid, but rather will see the future that we have the power to create.

The rest of the story is the faith we are now living. Our faith is linked to those who have gone before us. They are the cloud of witnesses who surround us now, encouraging us and cheering us forward. We are called not to get lost in our grief, but to harness the power of God’s presence in our midst and the example of the faithful who have gone before us and take this moment in time, our moment in time to live out our faith.

In the words of Gandhi, “We must be the change we want to see in the world.” By faith, we will be that change. By faith, we will take risks in the name of Jesus the Christ. By faith, we will live out our faith.

We are told in scripture that the followers of God are a peculiar people. In a culture where the emphasis is on fitting in, we are God’s people who stand out. We are not afraid to live our faith openly and courageously. By faith, we too live as God’s peculiar people. To quote 1st Peter 2:9: “...you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should declare the praise of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”

The cloud of witnesses surrounds us today and calls us to find inspiration in those who have gone before us. Our ancestors were flawed and human just like us. What sets them apart is that even in the midst of their flaws, they chose to live as God's people, God's peculiar, blessed, empowered people. God understands our humanness, but by faith empowers us to be more than we can be on our own. God gives us the vision for what the world might become and then one by one and community of faith by community of faith, fills us with the vision and passion and power to change this world.

We are not called to sit idle and spend a life of faith securing our personal comfort. We are called to take strength from those who have gone before us and to find in this moment in time the vision to live out our faith, for this will be the only chance we will be given. And in the end, when our names are added to the roll of the departed, it will not matter our station in life. What will matter is our faithful influence on the lives of others.

This baseball sits on a table in our home. It has for more than a decade. This baseball belonged to my courageous young friend, John. He died at 16, would be about 29 years old now. I feel his presence this morning. He is encouraging me and encouraging you. His time on earth was far too short. However, his story is not over. We are the rest of his story. We continue to take up where he left off. It is our turn to share the love of God. It is our turn to see the very precious nature of life and to live life to God's glory. It is our turn to actualize the power of God in our midst. It is our time, Meridian Street. We have seen and heard the power of the stories of page 2 and now it is time for us to write the rest of the story, a story of faith, a story of courage, a story of risk, a story of Divine love.

Thanks be to God for all those who have gone before us. Thanks be to God for our opportunity to live out our faith, right here, right now in 2007!