

Title: "A Living Faith: Noah"

Text: Hebrews 11:7; Genesis 6:9-22

In this new phase of our sermon series, we are focusing on what it means to have a "living faith" in all its dimensions.

-And we have turned to the 11th chapter of the Letter to the Hebrews in the New Testament to be a sort of guide for us.

Hebrews 11 gives an overview of a whole host of OT saints, -who exhibited "living faith" in their lives and in their generation.

We are taking some time to look at these people's lives in order to see what a multi-dimensional living faith looked like as they lived it out.

-Last week we began with Abel and Enoch from the beginning of the Book of Genesis.

-This week the writer to the Hebrews asks us to consider Noah.

-You know Noah! They guy who built the ark, and ushered in all the animals on earth two by two.

We read a little of Noah's story in the earlier reading from Genesis today.

-Listen now to what the writer to the Hebrews says about the kind of living faith Noah exhibited in his life and in his day.

Noah, "when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark...."

That one sentence is a great summation of what living faith meant for Noah.

-And what I'd like us to notice first, are the words "when warned."

Those two words reveal that God was the initiator of Noah's faith.

-It was God who showed up in Noah's life at some point and warned him about what was to come: a great flood.

And Noah's faith was in believing those words from God.
-And it was a "living faith," because he then went and did what God asked him to do.

You see, Noah didn't just decide one day that it would be a great idea to have a boat.

-In fact, Noah lived in a region that was landlocked.

-There were no oceans nearby, and no lakes or big rivers either.

-And the climate was arid, and dry, with very little rainfall.

So owning a boat was not even on Noah's wish list.

-He had no use for a boat.

But "when warned about things not yet seen," that is, a coming flood of major proportions,

-Noah was motivated to action:

-He believed God, and in holy fear, it says, he set about building an ark...a boat....a big boat.

In fact, it was more like an ocean liner.

-It was 450 feet long, that's a football field and a half!

-It was 75 feet wide, that's about 3 times as wide as this church.

-And like an ocean-liner it had multiple levels: lower, middle and upper decks.

You see, building this boat was a major undertaking, a huge construction project.

-And the only reason Noah undertook that crazy project was because God had warned him about things to come.

And Noah believed Him.

-That is where the faith came in.

-And his faith was shown to be a "living faith," because he acted on what God had said.

-He did what God told him to do, build an ark.

It's as simple as that.

-But for Noah, this thing called "living faith" was anything but simple.

-It was challenging, and demanding, and complicated.

1. It was challenging to believe what God said was true,

- because as I said a minute ago, Noah lived in a region where he had no experience of boats, or big bodies of water, or even of much rain.

He had never seen a flood before. He may have had no concept of what a flood even was.

So it was a major challenge for him to believe God's word was true.

- And can you imagine the response he got from his wife and kids and neighbors,
 - when he tried to explain to them that a flood was coming and he had to build a boat to get ready?
- They probably ridiculed him as some kind of a nut,
 - and there were days when he probably felt like they were right!

Believing in God's word and actually trusting that God's words are true can be just as challenging for us.

- We believe in this "other dimension" to life:
 - that there is a living God who actually does speak and is involved with His creation, and who loves us.
 - Other people, though, think this is a silly fantasy.
- We believe that this God has taken on human flesh and been born among us in the person of Jesus of Nazareth.
 - And though many people like celebrating Christmas, they think we are nuts to believe the manger story is actually true.
- We believe that little babe in the manger grew up to die on a cross as an atoning sacrifice for sin,
 - and rose from the dead overcoming sin and hell and death itself.
 - Other people think the whole idea of resurrection is pure nonsense.

And there are days, just like Noah, when we are not sure whether we are nuts or not.

It's a challenge to believe in the Word of God, and trust that what it says is true. A challenge in every age.

2. And it's also demanding.

For Noah, believing that God's word about the future was true, wasn't just a nice piece of information to be filed away.

The warning God gave him was accompanied by a set of instructions to be carried out!

-He had to build a boat, and he had no experience in boat building at all.

You go out and try to build a boat this week in your garage, -and see how you do.

-And this boat was to be huge, and was to house every imaginable animal, as well as Noah and his family.

Can you imagine the task set before Noah?

-It completely changed his life.

-He had to give up his day job.

-And not just for a couple of weeks...probably for years!

God's Word is like that for us, too, and for everyone God calls.

-He speaks his Word to us, and calls us to follow Him.

-And that call from God to follow...affects our whole life.

-It is never simply a call to attend church on Sunday mornings.

-No, when God calls us, it's a call to a relationship with Him that will begin to transform our whole life.

His word will rearrange our priorities just like it did for Noah.

His word will drag us out of our comfort zones just like it did for Noah.

His word will challenge our thinking, our values, our notions of the good life, our sense of right and wrong,

-just like it did for Noah.

And His word will put us at odds with the world around us just like it did with Noah.

This living faith God inspires within us is challenging, and demanding.

3. It's also complicated.

Noah is not being asked to build a boat for a pleasure cruise.

- He is actually being asked to become part of an act of judgment that God is bringing down on the people of the earth.
- Noah's family is going to be spared that judgment,
 - but all the other families on the earth are not going to be spared.
 - They're going to be wiped out. Drowned.

Wow. That's not easy to get your head around.

- Why is God bringing that kind of judgment on the earth?
- Why has he chosen Noah and his family to be spared by building and then getting into this ark?
- What about all these other people?
 - They're Noah's friends and neighbors.
 - There's the guy who sold Noah the lumber for the boat, and helped him carry the planks out to his car...or maybe to his camel.

Can you imagine being Noah, not only building this crazy boat,
-but knowing what was coming for all these other people?

This living faith of his did not make his life less complicated,
-but more complicated!
-It didn't just answer questions that he had about life and God, it raised more questions that he never even had before.

And who did he have to talk to about all of this?

- How did he go about trying to make sense of what God was doing in his world, and of what God had asked him to do?
- You think you have problems?
 - Just take some time to try and imagine yourself in Noah's place.

We read the story of Noah and the Ark to kids,

- because we like the whole idea of him gathering all of the different animals two by two.
- And there are little play toys of the Ark and all the animals.

But when you actually pay attention to the story,
-and what happens, and the judgment God brings on the
earth, it's a horror story.

Noah and his family probably suffered post-traumatic stress
when all was said and done.
-It's probably the reason that when the flood was all over
and Noah got out of the ark,
-he went and planted a vineyard and made wine and got
drunk.

What he and his family had witnessed of God's judgment was
probably more than they could cope with.

This living faith was challenging, and demanding, and
complicated.

Just like your life. And just like mine.

All that is to say, that a living faith is not a peaceful, easy
feeling.
-It isn't a special glow, or a beatific smile, or a never ending
sense of calm and serenity.

A living faith is simply what happens inside of us
-when God shows up in our lives and makes Himself
known.
-when God reveals to us who He is, and who we are, and
where the world is headed.

It is when God opens our eyes to all of this that we become
persuaded that He exists,
-and that He is calling us to follow him,
-and that the path He is calling us to walk out with him is a
path that leads to life,
-even though it is not an easy path he calls us to walk.

But as we saw last week, He convinces us in the process that
He is a rewarder of those who earnestly seek Him.
-He convinces us that He is good, and that walking in
relationship with Him is worth it.

His very presence in showing up in our lives convinces us,
-just like it did for Noah,
-that no matter how challenging, no matter how demanding,
no matter how complicated,
-following Him in faith is the only thing that makes sense to do.

A living faith is us simply saying, "Yes, Lord, I believe," and then setting out to follow and do what God asks.

And that might have big consequences in your life just like it did for Noah.

- It might mean a change in career path.
- It might mean giving up a relationship that you are in, but that you know isn't really a healthy or godly one.
 - Or staying in a relationship with your spouse, even though it is hard at the moment.
- It might mean taking a stand for:
 - justice in the face of injustice,
 - or truth in the face of what you know is a lie,
 - or for loving kindness in the face of meanness or intolerance or prejudice.

Or believing in what God says to us and following him might have all kinds of small consequences in your life.

- Just getting up this morning and coming to worship was a small decision you obviously made today.
- There were other things you could have chosen to do instead.
 - But you didn't. You chose to come to worship.

You may have also chosen to bring a tithe or an offering to worship today.

- It was a little decision you made to give some of your hard earned money back to God.
 - You didn't have to do that.
 - There were other things you could have done with that money...but you didn't, you brought it in thanksgiving to God.

Maybe you made a decision to spend time listening to someone this past week because they were hurting in some way.

- You have enough problems of your own, and could have chosen to put them off. But you didn't.

You see, there are little decisions we make everyday,
-but they are not insignificant.
-Rather they are signs of what we believe about God, about
life, about what we value.

A living faith is simply responding to God when He makes
himself known to us,
-and responding to what He tells us, by saying "Yes, Lord,"
and following Him.

Noah, "when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear
built an ark...."

That was how he became an heir of the righteousness that
comes by faith.

What does it look like for you?