

August 7, 2022 Sermon by Rev. Brent Damrow, includes installation of new Minister of Music, Peter Frost.

SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16 (New King James Version)

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

²For by it the elders obtained good report testimony.

³By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen are not made of things which are visible.

⁸By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place he would receive as an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going.

⁹By faith he dwelt in the land of promise, as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him in the same promise:

¹⁰For he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

¹¹By faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past the age, because she judged him faithful who had promised.

¹²Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born as many as the stars of the sky in multitude, innumerable as the sand which is in the sea shore.

¹³These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were assured by them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

¹⁴For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland.

¹⁵And truly, if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return.

¹⁶But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly, country: therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he has prepared a city for them.

SERMON: “Faith and New Beginnings” The Rev. Brent Damrow

It has come as a deep surprise to me. Something that I placed within a liturgy, and yet had no idea what a blessing it would be. It happens every Wednesday morning as part of morning prayer. That group gathers, and we share the fullness of life. We lift up our joys until they echo through the Zoom waves. We lift up our burdens until we remember that we are not alone. And then right before we leave, we enter into a time of silence, that we might discern hope. Not that we know what it is going in, from my perspective, but the blessing I have found is that often a hope just simply comes to me from beyond me. Something I wasn't necessarily thinking about, but something that suddenly flavors my day. We end the service in hope, that we might go out into the world bringing hope.

So this morning I want to invite you into a moment of silence. I want you to simply be. I want you to see if a hope comes to you. And now, since liturgy is the work of the people, I would ask you if you can to share your hope out loud. Did a hope come to anyone out there, and if so, what was it? (*Congregation: hope for good health for friends, for reconciliation with family members, for emerging butterflies, for the preservation of our democracy, for the care for creation, for quiet, for people who are suffering.*) It turns out hope shows up in many different ways and for many different reasons. I want you, though, on this day as we

welcome our new Minister of Music, Peter Frost, as we think about emerging from the pandemic and re-enlivening our music ministries, I want to invite you with that specific frame into a moment where you also might imagine a hope specifically for our music program. (*Congregation: hope for a full choir loft, for a change of seasons both literally and metaphorically, hope that Peter will find joy in his ministry here, hope for harmony again literally and metaphorically.*)

I love that this passage came our way today. I know that over the last two and a half years the idea of worshipping together, the idea of making a joyful noise – oh, I have built up hope upon hope upon hope, and I will try and let them go. For you see, in this reading today, it brings a couple of things to our heart and our mind that I think we need to know, a dance of sorts. There is the dance between hope and faith. Faith being the substance of things hoped for. Faith being the trust and assuredness of the good things that emerge when we walk in the way to the glory of God’s name. Faith and hope involved always in a dance.

But the bulk of this passage is about a dance of a different kind: the dance between God and ourselves. The dance between what God has planned for us – remember the prophet Jeremiah: “I have plans for you to give you hope.” But the difference in the dance between God’s plan and our own plans. No matter how good our plans might be for music, no matter how many things we want to tell Peter about what he should or shouldn’t do, and how he should and shouldn’t do it, the reality is that this is a beautiful moment for us to open ourselves, not just to what we want, not just to what we yearn for, but like Abraham to see if God is willing to send us in a direction we never imagined.

If you read in this passage from Hebrews, Abraham left having no idea where he was going. And friends, I think actually that was a great gift and blessing to him. For having no concrete plans, having no road map, having no Google maps to tell us which turns to take, Abraham had to simply rely on God, and rely on faith. And rely on, by the way, a great number of other people who left with Abraham to seek out this new home.

We have so much in our music programs to even be proud of in a humble kind of faithful way. And yet the question isn’t where have we been. The question isn’t only, at least, where have we been. The question isn’t only what can we imagine. The question isn’t only what do we think Peter should do. But the bigger question is about what God is inviting us to do and opening our hearts to see where Peter might lead us. And together, praying faithfully to discern what is the path that this new music ministry could take us on, even if we know nothing of that road.

Notice that in this passage – and sometimes, I don’t know if you’ve noticed, but we’re using a lot of different Bible translations in worship lately, partly because they are different perspectives on how to understand these things. And in this particular translation, there is beauty here. It says that Abraham dwelt in the land of promise, as in a foreign country. He dwelt secure in the land of promise, that we eventually are going to find a promised land, and in fact we are already there. But he did so as in a foreign country, refusing to get too settled, refusing to get too rooted, because he was always waiting for what God might show him next.

The question this passage in Hebrews brings up for us this morning is: do our hopes blend into plans, or are we open enough to let God show us a plan for our music, and for us to simply walk into it.

There in verse 15 is an important passage for us. It says that the people were looking for a homeland. And it says truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come, they would have had the opportunity to return. Think of the exodus, how many times did the people want to go back to miserable Egypt?

Friends, nothing about our music program here has ever been miserable. And yet there's an important moment here to say: do not hold on to that country, for we are a pilgrim people on the move. We can bring it all with us, and wait and see what God has yet to show.

As we start this new beginning, as we wait to see the butterflies emerge from the cocoons, let us now set our minds on where we have been or even where we want to go, but desire better things and let God show us. For God has plans for us to give us hope.

And how big is that plan? Go out tonight, lay on your back in the cool dampness of the grass, when it is pitch black, and simply look up to see how many stars there are. And by all means, do not try to count them, but simply be absorbed into the greatness and the grandness of them. For then, our hope will be grounded -- for this world, for our life, for our church, and for our music -- not in our own schemes, but rather in the one who laid out those stars. The one who has already promised and given us a home, and the one who always will give us a home. The one who simply asks us to step out and into new beginnings and new blessings, too many to count.

Remember, in the end of every faith, in the end of every story, in the end of every chapter, there is a new beginning. Amen.