

“Faith of Our Fathers”

We live in a world in which the scientific method requires that we have physical proof of something’s existence. We have to see something or hear something to believe in its existence. To believe in our God, however, requires that we have faith. This faith points to a reality that does not owe its existence to human awareness. This faith enables the understanding that God’s creation, which is seen, was made from that which was unseen, that is the word of God. When God spoke, the creation came into being. That the word of God brought into being the universe is a tenet of faith, which is proof of the unseen. Faith, then, joins the subjective and objective.

It is not really that hard to understand the interaction between faith and reality. In our daily lives we often put our faith in things we cannot see. Whenever we sit in chair for the first time, we have faith that the chair is put together properly and will hold us without breaking. We have this faith even though we have not examined the chair or found out who made it. Faith is proof of the unseen.

The great thing about our Christian faith is that it is looking forward, oriented toward the future, trusting that God will keep promises to those who believe. Faith cannot be separated from hope. We are given the example of Abraham in Genesis 17:1-8, whose hope is in the future, not to be fulfilled by

possession of real estate on earth. Abraham anticipates a city, permanent and with sure foundation, whose architect is God. This city is the heavenly Jerusalem, which Abraham will inhabit for eternity.

While on earth, Abraham knew he was a sojourner. Sojourn means a temporary stay. He knew he was never a permanent resident. Although he had been promised much by God, he knew the promise of a better land was in the new heavenly land, not on earth. Realistically, neither Abraham nor his son Isaac nor his grandson Jacob would physically see the Promised Land. They knew their time on earth was temporary, like living in a foreign land, living in tents.

The promise received by Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was that they would have a better life. They would have a better country, a heavenly one. This allowed them to live as sojourners on earth. Their faith allowed them to believe they would inherit much better than the actual land upon which they lived.

Abraham's faith is expressed in obedience, a quality which Abraham shares not only with Christians but with Christ himself. His faith is shown by his willingness to obey God, go out and sojourn, even when he did not know where he was going while on earth.

We also observe Abraham's great faith in his willingness to believe that God would make a great nation of him. Even though both he and his wife Sarah were

too old to have children, and she was barren, Abraham had great faith in God's promise that he would have many descendants. By faith, Abraham received the power of pro-creation. He did in fact become the father of many and the father of three prominent faiths, Judaism, Christianity and Islam. This extraordinary consequence flowed from a faith that trusted God as a keeper of promises.

So, what does this mean for us as Christians today in our faith? Although we cannot see God, we have faith God exists. We have the history of Abraham and others of great faith. Faith is not simply a belief that there is a God but trust that God rewards those who seek him. Faith profits from the experience of our forefathers, looking beyond the immediate to God's future. We have faith that we can look to the future of a promise of a new heavenly Jerusalem where we will enjoy God's creation for eternity.

In January 2016, we were introduced to Planet Nine. This addition to our solar system is thought to be ten times the mass of earth and 50 billion miles away. Scientists from the California Institute of Technology explained that, while they have not actually found the planet, they are sure it exists---because nothing else accounts for the way objects in the outer part of the solar system move. It must be there, says one astronomer, because nothing else could exert such influence. Even

though this planet cannot be seen, there is enough there that scientists have faith that it exists.

In the same way, none of us personally saw Jesus resurrected. We have the Gospel accounts, but we believe the resurrection because of the influence it has exerted. Only the resurrection could turn cowardly Peter into a preacher of renown, could transform Saul into the great missionary Paul. Only the resurrection could turn ordinary women and men into saints and martyrs, preachers, and prophets, activists and world changers. Generation after generation we make our way to the empty tomb and hear the words that rock our world. He is not here. He is Risen! He is Risen indeed! It is through our faith that we can declare in our communion liturgy that “Christ has died; Christ has risen; Christ will come again.”

I think about my own family when I consider what my ancestors did with their lives. They had faith in God which would stretch for generations. My great-great grandfather, Benjamin Dudley Culp, had faith in the people of Union County when he donated the stone for the church building for Grace United Methodist Church in Union, SC. Being given the honor of naming the church, he said, “Her name shall be Grace and may she never fall from it.”

I think of my great-grandmother, Belle Powell Culp, who was a stalwart member of Grace. She led a Sunday school class for years. There is still a picture

of her there today in the class named for her. She spent countless years ministering to people and spreading the gospel. She influenced her grandson, my father, William Wallace Culp, Jr, to go into the ministry. In turn, he influenced his brother, John Culp, to go into the ministry. Think of the work they have done for the kingdom. Even though Ms. Belle had been physically dead since 1961, her faith continues on. I, of course, was also influenced by my ancestors as I contemplated God's call into the ministry.

Like Abraham, we know we are only sojourners on this earth and our permanent residence is in the heavenly kingdom. Does that mean we just sit here and wait for the heavenly reward? No, we still need to be witnesses while on this earthly realm and need to live the life that Christ taught us to live. Because of our faith, we can declare the beauty of God's creation and can also be witness to the return of Jesus to establish his kingdom on earth. Let us praise God for his promises. Praise God!