

**Christ Presbyterian Church
Edina, Minnesota
September 17 & 18, 2011
John Crosby
Faith That Moves
Hebrews 11:1-13**

Somebody talked to me this week and said they loved our kickoff weekend last week. They thought the video was powerful and that the music tied in with both 9/11 and the theme of the day. They looked forward to coming together as a body and seeing people they hadn't all summer, but then this woman said, "You know, I liked the sermon and the way you did that, but I felt like when you talked about faith and hope and love, faith that moves and hope that endures, and love that shows up, I felt like wow! It's going to be a long fall." And I was delighted to hear that. But then she said, "No, no. These are big words, but they are words we use all the time. They have lost their juice. You say *faith* and *hope* and *love*, and people's eyes start to glaze over. How are you going to make that come to life?"

I think that's a great question. Some of you have heard more sermons on faith than I have had to endure in my whole life, and others of you are still trying to figure out what these big words mean. I had a window of insight into this idea of faith. Last summer we were on sabbatical and as part of that, in May we ended up flying to a World Vision board meeting in Brazil. The flight all the way down to Rio, 12-13 hours, was a strain, but then after the board meeting in Rio ended on Friday, I had another board meeting in Africa on Sunday. So we had to take four different airplanes, 23 hours, to go from Rio to Sao Paolo to Joburg to Lusaka to Livingstone and pray that our luggage would somehow show up.

We are on a transatlantic flight that starts at 11:00 at night. I kid you not, no pastoral exaggeration, I am in row 44, 44E. It's a pretty light flight from Rio to Sao Paolo but then in Sao Paolo, the plane just fills up with infants, and I am in the kids' section. Really! And it was full. I am not kidding you. After about an hour and a half on the flight with this wailing and screaming of kids, one would finally get quiet and another one would pick up and sing the second verse. It was almost a joke. This guy in front of me, a young Japanese-American guy, is holding a baby who is screaming and sort of rocking him, trying to quiet him down. Finally he stands up with the baby and turns to me and goes, "Oh, Dude, sucks to be you!" I'm not kidding!

So there were 10 hours left in the flight, and you know how it happens. You are half in a daze. You know you are supposed to go to sleep. "Go to sleep now. Go to sleep. Now!" But it is so uncomfortable you can't sleep. Then the guy in 44F kind of plops over and all of a sudden his head is on my shoulder. I'm going, "Ohhh, pleeeeeease." And I'm looking over there and sort of doing the twitch, you know, twitchee here.... Then I go, "Oh, did you wake up? Sorry!" And he went, "Uh-uh." "I'm sorry, sorry," and I turn to him and try to make it better. I say, "Can you believe this! Four flights. Customs four times. And 24-25 hours to get over there. Can you believe this?"

He goes, "Yeah, I can! You know, my first time it was five different ships in four different months. It took us *four months* to get there, from America to the other side of Africa." I was like, "Ohhhhh! I'm John." "My name is Adoniram." I'm going, "Is this one of those little dreams, you know, where you are half-asleep, half-awake? Is this a dream? Is this really happening?" I said, "Adoniram, four months?" He goes, "Yeah. We went to Burma." We call it Myanmar now. He said, "My wife died on the trip. I stayed there for a couple of years, but nobody would listen to me." About 8 years he stayed. "I remarried in Burma, and then we returned by ship to America, and my second wife died on that trip. And so then I returned to Burma." It had to have been a dream I'm sure, but Adoniram looked at me and said, "Are you a man of faith?" Well, right then I did not feel like a man of faith, but it was a different kind of question....

Do I have to say, his name was Adoniram Judson. He was an 18th century American, one of the very first Americans who became a missionary, and he went to Burma. His third wife finally buried him in Burma 41 years after he had started his ministry. He turns to me and says, "Are you a man of faith? Do we have the same faith?" It changes what you think about faith and hope and love if somebody asks, "Is that who you are?"

Here is what I'd like you to do, and for those of you who are visitors for the first or second time, I apologize, but we're going to do this anyway. I want everybody to stand up and greet someone you don't know. Now listen, it is very easy. You turn to someone you don't know and say, "Hi, my name is...." And then after you have done the names, just say when you hear the word *faith* what the first word is that pops into your mind." That's easy. Okay. Stand and we'll take three minutes (*pause*).

We did this last night at the Saturday service. It was a little easier with 200 than with 700 but I asked that they would just call out some of the words that they heard. When you heard the word *faith*, what were some of the things that came to your mind? Hope. Trust. Belief. History. God. Jesus. Abraham. Jews, did I hear? Peace. Belief. Protection. Love. We could just keep going because it strikes us all a little bit differently. Last night a little boy I talked with, a 10-year old, said, "Happiness," and his mom said, "Hope," and the dad said "Steadfast. I don't know, it just came to my mind." I talked with this woman 50-51 years-old and asked her, "What does faith mean to you?" and she goes, "Pregnant at 45. I just won the prize. But it was good," she said. "A gift from God that I didn't ask for, that I wasn't sure I wanted, but it was a gift from God and by faith, that came to me." What is faith besides one of those words, those churchy words, that you used?

I think that if I were to ask Adoniram in 44F what faith is, he might say, "Faith is a treasure map. Faith is a map that shows you how to get to the treasure. Faith shows you that there is something more out there than what you see around you and gives you a map for how to get to that better place. The Hotz family (Mike Hotz, Associate Pastor of Urban/Local Engagement and Congregational Care) read, "By faith we understand the universe was created by God." This is a map not only of the universe but with God's hand on it. Faith is a treasure map. We join a group of people on a treasure hunt. We come together to compare our maps. It's not something we are making up. We are choosing to believe *this* and not to believe *that*, but that thing over there that I want to reject, that may be the most important thing three years from now. The treasure map shows us the real world that is invisible to our eyes. The treasure map is a Bible that looks a lot like that Bible right there. This is where it comes from, these pictures and stories and images of God creating the world, putting you in the world saying, "There is treasure here. Go find it."

I have a friend, Craig Barnes, who was the pastor of the Presbyterian National Church in Washington, DC. He and I were having an argument once, 15 years ago or so, when I had come to the place where I believed that a lot of liturgy in our church had sort of lost its way, had become stale, *now I lay me down to sleep. I pray the Lord my soul to keep.* "It doesn't do anything," I said. "We don't need liturgy like we used to." And Craig sent this back to me. He said, "I disagree. Faith comes to *us*. We don't go to faith. Faith comes to *us*, not because we have argued ourselves into believing or because we have found the courage to take a leap of faith. Faith is not so much in the intellect or the emotion. It is in the will. Faith is a choice to believe, and it is made for the same reason, John, that people chose to love. People chose to love, and people chose to believe. Why? Because you get grabbed by love. You're responding to somebody's love. Faith is a response to God's grace. It changes your vision of the world."

Well, I was with him all the way. I loved that. I held on to that view, that faith comes to us, but then he went on and said this. "So every Sunday when we stand up in front of the congregation and say the Apostles' Creed, we are doing something that is so strange today. We are each saying that our beliefs, our faith, did not originate in our hearts. We are saying that our beliefs were written down by other people centuries ago. It is not *your* creed that we say in the church. We don't all stand up in the church and recite *our* personal mission statements. No, we affirm the great faith of the people of God, stronger than the faith of any single one of us, and that is a real comfort to me," Craig said, "because there are lots of days when my faith isn't so strong. Some days I have as much unbelief as belief in my heart. On those days I lean into the faith of God's people and I remind myself that Jesus is too big to fit in my heart." We tell our kids, "Jesus is in your heart," but Jesus is too big to fit inside your heart. He is all over. He is in *us*. "Thank God for that. Thank God that there is more to Jesus than just I know," Craig said. "When my faith is crippled by fear or confusion, I am held up by the sturdy, great faith of the historic church."

This is the treasure map we all have. Faith is a treasure map God gives to the church *together*. He says, "Figure this out." But faith is not *just* a treasure map. When you get a treasure map, what are you supposed to do? You are supposed to go on a treasure hunt. **Living by faith is a journey**, a journey from home to this place where this treasure really is. Adoniram leaves his home and goes to a different home in Burma, over four months and two wives in the making. This is a message so counter to our culture. It is a reminder that we are not home. We build beautiful homes. We try to craft enjoyable lives. Very rarely are we reminded that *this is not home*. We are not built to live here forever. I love country and western music because it tells great stories. One of the songs that came out the last couple of years is *This Is My Temporary Home*. This is not where I'm going to be, but it is tough, frankly, to talk about that other home when this home is so good. This home is good for a lot of us. Here it is really good. One of my friends has a big church in Scottsdale, Arizona. He said, "If you think it is tough to preach here, try preaching in Scottsdale." He said, "Scottsdale is where it is really tough to preach because it's so good." He said "In the winter it is so beautiful, people don't even want to go to heaven. In the summer it is so hot, they are not afraid of hell."

It can be hard to believe but this is not our home. **Faith is not faith unless you pick up the treasure map and start to move.** It has always been like this. People want to put down their roots here in this world and make *this* their home. At the fall of the Roman Empire, Rome itself is being invaded time after time, and Christians are being blamed. They said, "We were strong when we were pagans. Now all this *love your neighbor, love your enemy* is killing us. Literally." There was a bishop in northern Africa who was named Augustine, St. Augustine. He talked

about, “No, it is just that you live in the wrong city,” and he wrote a book called *The City of God*. He said, “There is one city that we see when we visit Rome. Magnificent. Huge. Powerful. Everybody wants to be in Rome. It presses in on us. But there is another city that is far beyond us that you can only see by faith, and those of us who follow Jesus are walking with Jesus toward that city. We are starting to orient our lives around *that* city instead of *this* one. We are starting to act like they act there.” In the book Augustine claims that the cities of earth, marred by greed and injustice, have always been in conflict with the city of God and its peace and justice. Augustine says, “Rome will fall but God will build His city, and the mission of those who live by faith is to throw their lives into building that city and moving toward it.” Everybody in history who has lived by faith, everybody in Scripture, sets out toward the City of God and never stops moving toward it.

John Calvin who really sort of created the Presbyterian idea, said that faith is “leaving what is in one’s hand to go seeking what is far off and unknown to us.” That doesn’t mean you change zip codes. It doesn’t mean you physically move at all. It means **faith propels your life to a new place**, to know God who seems so far off, so distant sometimes. It means we have to keep growing and moving. Faith is not a body of God-knowledge that you pick up in the pew in church. **Faith is a journey to grow closer to God.** That is what the Hotzes read about this morning in Hebrews chapter 11. It introduces us to some of the people on that journey of faith, going from the cities that we see to the cities that are written on the treasure map. It introduces us to the people who have gone off the edges of the map to *terra incognita*. Here be dragons! They went off the map, but before they went off the map, somebody wrote their names in the margins of the map. So we see by faith, Abel and Enoch and Noah and Abraham and Moses and all those who passed through the Red Sea, and Rahab and Gideon and Barak and Sampson and David and all the prophets. Their names are written at the edge of the map to say, “We got this far, and then we kept going.” They spent their lives believing that there was something out there, and each one inherited the hope of the person who went before. But none of them arrived. None of them made it to the city. Verse 10 says their faith led them to leave home.

¹⁰ ...looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

And that changed their lives, but verse 13 says,

¹³ All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth.

Their faith outlived them. They died still faith-FULL. That is a great thing. It scares us sometimes. “You mean I’m not going to know, even before I die?” No! Faith in God saves us from the small, little dreams that we get too quickly. St. Augustine again, “Nothing worth doing can be accomplished in one lifetime.” So that means I need another lifetime? That’s right. That’s faith. You need more than one lifetime.

So we could add to the list of journeyers who picked up the treasure map and started to walk to the new city, right? The writer of Hebrews doesn’t put down the names of the apostles. They should be on the treasure map, Peter and Paul and Barnabas and Philip. When they died, they still had a long way to go to get to the city. It wasn’t even clear to them that the church would survive, but they lived their life serving. And if you were adding to the margin, you could

probably add the journeyers in the life of the church who were the great theologians, Augustine and Aquinas, Luther, Barth, Lewis. They all spent their whole lives trying to understand what was just over that hill, what was over that ridge of faith to get there, to get toward the city. They didn't finish the work before they died. We should also scribble in the names of the pioneers of the faith, who saw that the Kingdom of God, the City of God, is filled with justice, who worked for justice here saying, "This is a sign that the kingdom is coming." Frederick Douglass, Mother Teresa, Martin Luther King, Jr., all of them committed their lives to a vision that outlived them. They are also people who walked off the map.

We could add the names of all kinds of people, church leaders and theologians and social justice folks. You could probably even put in names of people you don't know like Adoniram Judson. My problem with those names is that as good as they are, they are all out there on the edge of the map. They are living extreme faith. When I hear the story of Adoniram Judson or the apostle Paul, I go, "Oh, that's great!" and I'm either inspired or I feel guilty, but I don't change. I'm not sure that you live more faithfully. We need to add some more names to that roll call of people who are walking toward the City of Heaven, who are right around us, and say that their name is going to be on that roll some day, too.

Several years ago there was a woman here who was entering middle age, had a good job, but decided that the treasure map was telling her she should move. So she sells her house, left a good job with an extremely talented and dedicated boss who cared a lot about her. She bought an RV, went out to the West Coast and got her Ph.D. Then she came back to the Twin Cities so she could teach people how to tell the message of faith, not extreme faith but everyday faith that gets us off of the main road and onto the narrow road. The treasure map takes us on the narrow roads that Jesus calls us to.

There is a teenage boy here who on Sunday nights sits right up there, the front row, at The Table service. He has all the pressures teenage kids have to be normal or popular, but he starts to hear Jesus calling him. When he comes over to Jesus, Jesus sort of points to a whole new group of kids, kids who are not cool, not popular, not athletes. This kid goes and sits down next to them in the cafeteria at school and gets to know their names and says weird things like, "Hey, why don't you come with me and some friends," or "I'll pray for you," or "Why don't you come with me to church." Almost every Sunday now he is sitting there, and there are two or three kids next to him who are surprised that somebody cares about them. It is not extreme faith but it is a different road, a narrow road. Jesus talks about everybody going to go down the main highway. "I'm following You on the narrow road because that's where the treasure is."

There is a man who often comes to this service who after he retired chose to help a couple of hours a week with Urban Homeworks, just something to do. That turned into a day a week. Then he became a crew boss. Then they asked if he would be on the board. Then they asked if he would help them raise money. He said, "Now I'm working harder than I did when I had a job and I'm not getting paid anything for it." He said, "But God is coming alive for me!" God has shown him a different road to get to the treasure. Here and now it points toward the city *there* and *then*. All those names are going to be added to the list in Hebrews 11, and now we come to your name. Adoniram Judson turns to me and says, "Are you a man of faith?" Will your name be on that list?

One of the reasons we come here together is to examine our own lives, not just to hear good music and see friends but to ask, "How are you really doing on the journey?" Is this about faith

or has this degenerated into religion? If you are talking about faith as a treasure hunt, are you stuck? Do you feel like you are making progress? Are you changing your life? Are you scared? Do you feel like you are alone on this road and nobody else understands?

Last night as I was talking about this, I looked over here and saw this woman who two months ago lost her beloved husband at age 50. I bet if you asked her how she was doing, she would say she was shipwrecked. She's having to look for a new way to get to the treasure. History makes some names great, but they were all ordinary people, born with less opportunities than we have. The thing that made those people great isn't that they worked hard or they set great, lofty goals, but they got seized by the great faith of God's people. They discovered a vision of life beyond them, of the city. In heaven they will be joined by the others whose names are written on the treasure map because they all had a conviction that **faith is the assurance of things that we do not see**. That is what defines a person of faith, that they believe that the most important things are the things that we do not see.

So in one sense, everybody's got faith, right? You can almost prove that, but the most important things are the things we don't see because, let me ask you this. Why do parents knock themselves out to raise those little blobs of flesh we call children? Why would they do anything for these kids that are just a mess? It is because they have a vision of what this child could become and we love them so much, we will do anything for that. **Faith has to change the way that we live**. I read a book in the last couple of weeks by the new pastor over at Colonial. His name is Daniel Harrell. Dr. Harrell comes from Boston, and he is an exceptional writer. I understand he is a really boring speaker though, and I wouldn't encourage you to go to hear him. I think he is going to become a good friend. Daniel wrote a book called *How to Be Perfect: One Church's Audacious Experiment In Living the Old Testament Book of Leviticus*, a 30-day experiment living the Book of Leviticus, you know, the one with all the weird rules. He and a group of people at his church lived those rules out for 30 days. Just about killed them. But he said, "Faith has to change the way that we live." This is how he ends the book,

For reasons sometimes hard to comprehend, God so loved the world that he sent his Son to live and die for it. And for reasons sometimes even harder to comprehend, God so loves the world that he sends his people, you and me, to live and die to ourselves for the sake of spreading his love: forgiving, feeding the hungry, doing justice, speaking truth with love, not being ashamed of the gospel, caring about somebody else for a change.

That is what faith does. It isn't something that helps us cope better with our stressful lives. In fact, faith will add stress to your life as it forces you to deal with obstacles that stand between you and our great hope. If you want stress-free living, you don't want faith. Because faith will put you to work. If you want stress-free living, go buy the little bungalow at the golf resort. But if you want your life to make a difference, then do not resist the Holy Spirit who is constantly offering you opportunities to participate in the life and work of Jesus Christ in this world.

Let me paraphrase Thornton Wilder, you know, he did all those aphorisms. Thornton Wilder says something like this. Faith and hope may be projections of the imagination. They are nothing. We just imagine them. They may be projections of the imagination but then so is despair. Despair is just a projection of the imagination. Despair embraces all the bad that it sees; faith is an energy that arouses the mind to explore every possibility to combat despair. Faith tries every door. Faith goes off the map and tries the next door. It is not your job to break

the door down. It is your job to walk over to it and let God show you what happens next. I'm glad we are on this journey together. Let's pray.

Lord Jesus, I thank You that You are the author and perfect-er but also that You are the pilot. You are the one who journeyed first to the edge of the map that had death on it and came back alive and said, "Follow Me. I will show you life in all its abundance and all its fullness. Follow Me. You won't be like everybody else. Follow Me, and I will bring you to a city where a river of life runs through the middle, and God will bless you." In the Name of the Father, Son, and the Spirit. Amen.

The nature of oral presentations makes them less precise than written materials; any lack of attribution is unintentional, and we wish to credit all those who have contributed to this sermon. Soli Deo Gloria.