

South Bay Community Church
Sermon Reflection
Remnant People - Live by Faith
19 June 2022

Rev. Bryan Murphy, Superintendent Western Region E.C.C.

Scripture Texts: Hebrews 10:35-39, 11:3-11, 17-23, 24-28, 39-40, 12:1-2.

Sermon Preamble

In recent history, our country has been in a polarized and divided state, with tension, anxiety, devastation, and brokenness. We need God's Word of encouragement. Contemplating Father's Day and Juneteenth brings to mind those of African descent who came before us, persevered, held fast to God, and received God's reward in blessing. The journey they were on and the faithfulness they showed is why we are here. We can all reflect and see those who have shaped us, encouraged us, and prayed for us. They help us continue to live into what God has for us. Thoughts about fathers can be metaphorical; the idea of fathers can be honorary, biological, or spiritual for those who invested in us, cared for us, and prayed for us. We thank those men and women who poured into us, gave a word of encouragement when we were unsure, gave us wisdom, and were an example of what it meant to be people of faith in difficult times. As we explore God's Word in Hebrews 11, scripture called the heroes of faith, let's receive from God a word of encouragement that it may be a path to our feet to lead us through difficult and dark times so our lives may be pleasing to God.

Not those who shrink back and are destroyed, but those who believe and are saved

"So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised. For in just a very little while, 'He who is coming will come and will not delay. But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him.' But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved" (Hebrews 10:35-39). This portion of scripture is immediately preceding our scripture text of Hebrews 11. There are many reasons to shrink back today. We might shrink back from our faith, our convictions, our lives in seeking after and following God. The author of Hebrews reminds us that shrinking back is not our destiny. Instead, our destiny is to be bold and courageous, not veering to the left or right in following the path that God has laid out for us.

Let's be encouraged as we are reminded of the call that God put on our lives. As a believer, God called you from the former ways and invited you into the glorious life, giving you gifts, power, purpose, and passion. No one else on this planet can do the specific work God called you to do. When we get to difficult times, with things pulling at us, demanding our attention, and distracting us, we can forget the calling of God on our life. God's Word is very clear that nothing on heaven or earth can remove you from the love of God or diminish the call that God has on your life. Not illness, not finances, not good or bad economies, not global famines can diminish the fullness that God has created you for this time.

As we move into Hebrews 11, we have been reminded who we are.

The Remnant People of God

We are living in another day as the remnant people of God. Remnants have two characteristics. One characteristic is that the Body of Christ seems to shrink. It seems like: the world and everything around us is against us; we are outnumbered; we are not going to make it through. But the most powerful movements of God often come from remnant people.

Gideon, in going into battle, had too many people with them. God kept shrinking their numbers down because God wanted them to realize that the victory was because of God. Sometimes, when we see people falling away from the movement of the people of God, it could mean that God is preparing us for a battle and wants us to remember the source of our victory.

As the remnant people of God, God is calling us to be ready for this season. God tells us not to be surprised when hard times come, like something strange is happening. A hard time is the journey of the people of God. When we see wars and rumors of wars, see parents and children at odds, see a couple's divorce, these are like labor pains of creation.

God is birthing something new. When you became a believer in Jesus Christ, God planted a seed in your spirit. Nothing will stop that seed from coming to fruition; nothing can stop the fullness of what God has designed for your life. The problem is that we get distracted, pulled away, and overwhelmed by our circumstances.

God's Call to Remembrance

But accept God's call back to remembrance. Remember when you believed God's promises. Remember when you were excited about something God had for you to do. Remember when you were confident that God was in you. Remember that you know you were going through some trials, you have some problems, you have some circumstances. But you know that he who is in me is greater than anything the enemy or the world can put in front of me. In Hebrews 11, we have examples of those who remembered and walked through this life with power. God uses the remnant people for God's purposes.

In reading Hebrews 11, we see the history of Abraham, Isaac, Noah, Sarah, and all these people who lived a long time ago and did wonderful things that we are probably never going to be able to match up to. As we read the Hebrews 11 scripture now, let's focus on God, the person who put the people in place. The author is showing us what it means to walk as a person of faith.

Four Characteristics of Faith

If we can get the four characteristics, then we have the opportunity to be just a powerful, transformative, and impactful. Generations from now, in your own lineage of history generations from now, someone will write the story of the impact of your life.

"By faith....Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did....Enoch walked with God (relationship).And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him...Noah, in holy fear – built an ark....Abraham obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going.... for he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God....Abraham and Sarah believed God and RECEIVED the promise" (Hebrews 11:3-11). Abel offered a better sacrifice than Cain. Enoch was taken up into the heavens. Noah built an ark, even though he was not sure of the circumstances. Abraham left his home area of comfort and went to a land far away. Abraham and Sarah believed that God was going to give them a child, when all doctors and biology said it would never happen.

Characteristic 1 - Obedience

The first characteristic we see in these remnant people is obedience. The foundation of faith is obedience. Obedience is not a word we like, not eliciting many declarations of amen. Freedom is a word we like, but God's Word says nothing about freedom in this chapter. People had a Word from God, a direction from God, a function from God. They had a choice, and these people chose to obey God in spite of the obstacles. These remnant people were regular people raising families, going to work, and doing the same stuff we do. They were regular people who just happened to live a long time ago. They became heroes of faith because their first act was to say to God, "I heard your voice, and I will obey." What commitments have you made to God in the past? What things has God put on your heart as a task or burden for someone or a group of people you care about? What situation breaks your heart that you know is not from yourself, but it is from God? Remember the time you said that you are going to invest your time and resources to be part of the solution and break this generational curse.

You were going to use your talent, time, and resource to give it back to God, so that God may do something good, powerful, and amazing in your life.

Are you still holding fast? Or have the pressures of life called obedience to fall to the background. We all have things that we dreamed about and ideas of what God would do, but the pressures of life and the worries of the world happen. The Bible uses the image of seeds scattered on rocky soil that choke out the seeds; similarly, we have good dreams, plans, and purposes, but life chokes it out of us. Tear off those things that bind us, and live into the fullness of what God has prepared for you. Today, remember and recommit to obedience in the good work God assigned to you. Blessings lie in obedience to God.

Characteristic 2 - Legacy Investment

By faith, “Abraham offered Isaac as a sacrifice....Isaac blessed Jacob’s and Esau’s future....Jacob blessed each of Joseph’s sons, and worshiped as he leaned on the top of his staff. Joseph died speaking about the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt and gave instructions about his bones. By faith, Moses’ parents hid him for three months after he was born, because they saw he was not ordinary child, and they were not afraid of the king’s edict” (Hebrews 11:17-23). The Hebrew author lists people that made a decision to invest in the generations coming behind them. Abraham offered Isaac, his son, as a sacrifice. Abraham built his life on one promise from God: God said that God would give Abraham a son and through Abraham’s seed, everyone on earth would be blessed. Abraham reoriented his whole life around that one promise from God. God then told Abraham to take that promise and sacrifice it. What gift has God given to you, and then God asks you to put it back on the altar as a sacrifice. It may be some ability, some blessing, something you were glad to take possession of, something you strived for that you finally received, and then some things seem to come up that is going to take it away. Discernment is important, but sometimes God will ask us to put back on the altar what God gave us to see if we are faithful because God is going to do multiplication from our faithfulness. So Abraham offered Isaac as a sacrifice, and God provides the Ram in the Bush.

Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau and the future that was to come behind them. When Jacob was grown, he blessed each of Joseph’s sons. Joseph in his dying breath is speaking about the promises of God, the faithfulness of God, and the Exodus and the good things God has done. Jacob is so confident that God is going to complete the promise that he directs the people not to bury him in the foreign land. Joseph directs for subsequent generations to take his bones to the land that God promised. Joseph in his dying breath was committed that God was still faithful, even though the promises didn’t happen in his lifetime. Some of God’s promises to us, we are not going to see on this side of heaven. The reality is that God promised them through you or maybe through the generations coming after you. We take our possible disappointment, our pain, and our struggles, and we form wisdom to inform the next generation. We pray that the blessings that God has in store for them are fulfilled, even though we did not see the completion of it in our lifetime. To the generation coming behind us, we plant seeds of the legacy of God’s faithfulness, goodness, trustworthiness, abundant grace and favor.

In this world, we try to pass on material wealth. But if you spend your time investing in material wealth for the next generation, you have not planted seeds of eternity that comes from the Word of God, the faithfulness of God, and the witness of God. If you have not planted the seeds from the Word of God, you are setting up your subsequent generations for a drastic disappointment. Since the storms around us will be raging, we are preparing the generations coming behind us.

The seeds that God gives to us may not be biological. Some of your best planting will come from children you did not birth. Some of your best investment as a remnant person will be because you took the time to see one that the world had discarded as not worth the investment. But you see with divine eyes that person worthy of investing time, energy, and resources. Generations will be blessed because of your investment in someone not biologically yours. We look for those God has brought to us. The Gospel lives generation to generation; if one generation decides not to pass on the Gospel, it is

lost. A generation so caught up by the world and circumstances may not make it a priority to teach a child in the proper way. Children may include older adults that we should invest in.

Characteristic 3 - A Heart to Serve

It is a heart to serve. "By faith, Moses when he had grown up refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin" (Hebrews 11:24-25). In modern day vernacular, Moses refused his privilege. Moses had the ability not to walk in the suffering of the people around him, even though he had come from them. But Moses chose to put down his privilege and enter into the suffering of those people. Similarly, we have all kinds of privileges. There are privileges within Economic classes; there are privileges between genders. As an African American man, I can claim I am less privileged than some, but even as a male I am more privileged in many situations than women. We can philosophically agree with people who are hurting and stay arm's length away from the pain. Staying away doesn't cost us anything, but in this season, God has called us to pay the price. We have to give up some resources, time, energy, and emotional collateral that is going to cost us. As we enter into the pain of those who are suffering in our weakness, the Spirit and the presence of God enters with us.

Characteristic 4 - Perseverance in victory and defeat

"I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson and Jephthah, about David and Samuel and the prophets, who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions....those who were beaten, those who know what real suffering is like went through the mountains, but also the valleys, and they held on to God through the journey....They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated- the world was not worthy of them..." (Hebrews 11:32-38). The Word of God says be faithful and persevere and hold fast to the promises of God, and the reward is coming. All of them, despite their circumstances held fast to: God is good, God is faithful, and God is true. When we get to glory, the journey will be revealed for God's goodness in our lives. Those whose shoulders we are standing upon held fast to the Word of God.

Application of Sermon Principles to Good Works

"These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised" (Hebrews 11:39). What had been promised is a Messiah, who would restore us back into right relationship with God and show us to live in perfect harmony with our Father God. All of them were longing to see that. We know that Jesus is real, and then Easter seems like a long time ago. How many disasters, tragedies, and horrible things make us lament as the world sucks the joy of the resurrection out of our lives in minutes? As the remnant of God, we don't let the world steal our joy or our confident hope that we believe.

"God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect" (Hebrews 12:40). Together with us, those in the past are made perfect by our faith. Even though we did not see it, as those coming after us are made perfect by our faithfulness. Our faithfulness is generational and comes into the ultimate climax where God restores a broken world, and we are agents of that work of God. God calls us simply to be people of faith, to be obedient, to plant seeds of eternity, to find the broken in the hurting. God has given you a burden for investing in their life, and then persevere.

Everybody is faithful to something. The question is: What is the object of your faith? When the object of your faith is rooted in the Word of God and the Person of Jesus Christ, the rest of your life is reoriented around the object of faith. These characteristics become part of the manifestation of who God called you to be. "Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance

the race marked out for us" (Hebrews 12:1). The great cloud of witnesses includes those who strove, invested, sacrificed, held on, and poured into us wisdom and encouragement, the biblical heroes of the past, and angels in heaven praying for our faithfulness. This life is choking out, distracting, and pulling us away from the fullness of our journey. Let us throw it off. Run with perseverance, and fix our eyes on Jesus.

May God give us the courage and boldness to hold fast to God's promises! If you have one breath left in your lungs, God is not finished in the good work God intended for you in this life. . .

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Sermon Preamble

As we celebrate the newly declared holiday of Juneteenth, what lessons can we learn from looking at the faith of our African American ancestors who held fast to their faith in God even in the difficult season of American slavery?

As we celebrate Father's Day, who are the metaphorical "fathers" (can include both men and women), even those not your biological father, who have invested in you, cared for you, and prayed for you?

Not those who shrink back and are destroyed, but those who believe and are saved

The writer of Hebrews identifies with the readers and sees only two possibilities. One possibility is persevering in faith to final salvation. The other possibility is drawing back from faith and facing the consequences. How difficult is it to persevere in faith due to difficult circumstances? What spiritual practices will help you persevere in faith even in difficult situations? How has encouragement from God and other people helped? Why?

The Remnant People of God

If you see that the number of believers in Christ declining in any sphere, does this mean that God is not moving forward with a powerful movement of the Kingdom of God? When have you seen God initiate a powerful movement of the Kingdom of God despite a relatively low number of people? What factors and characteristics of people in the Church may be more important than increasing or decreasing numbers? If a substantial portion of the Church is not faithful to God's Word, has God used a faithful remnant to represent God's Will to the broken world?

God's Call to Remembrance

What is a prior time of excitement and confidence in your Christian journey that God may be calling you to remember? In that remembrance, how do you discern whether God is calling you back to that excitement and confidence in your life mission, even with current trials, problems, and difficult circumstances in your life journey?

Four Characteristics

Consider if someone were to write a faith story on the impact of your life. If someone generations from now wrote it, what story of faith in God could that person write about you? How are you passing on to subsequent generations your story of faith in God?

Characteristic 1 - Obedience

As you face the choice whether to obey a Word from God, a direction from God, or a function from God, what obstacles or pressures of life can cause obedience to fall to the background with the result of disobedience?

Characteristic 2 - Legacy Investment

What gift, if any, such as some ability, some blessing, something you strived for that you finally received that God has asked you to take the promised gift to the altar and sacrifice it? What lesson did you learn and how did you grow from being willing to sacrifice the promised gift?

Other than with material wealth, how have you blessed the next generation by planting seeds of eternity, such as the Word of God, the faithfulness of God, and the witness of God? How important is it to plant and invest with people in the next generation who are not connected with you biologically?

Characteristic 3 - A Heart to Serve

How are you privileged compared to some other people? How can you give up resources, time, energy, and emotional collateral to enter into the pain of the underprivileged? As we enter the suffering and weakness of the underprivileged, how do we know that the Spirit and Presence of God is with us?

Characteristic 4 - Perseverance in victory and defeat

Why is it important to persevere and hold fast to the promises of God, whether the circumstances result in temporary victory or temporary defeat?

Application of Sermon Principles to Good Works

Why is faithfulness from generation to generation and in each generation so important?