

VOTC Feb. 26, 2017

Where Do You Think You're Going?

Hebrews 11:1, 8-19

Hello again, dear listeners;

Here we are already more than a month into the year 2017. Pretty well all the Christmas trees have been deposited in your nearest landfill. And our New Year resolutions....? Well let's not get into that for it might be a bit embarrassing!

The fact is, "*The best laid plans of mice and men go often askew*". It's a common malady of humankind, We toss, we turn, this way and that, but scarcely, resolutely know where we are going.

We're not that different from Oliver Wendell Holmes, that former justice of the United States Supreme Court. Rev. Dr. Oswald Hoffmann, for years was the principal speaker of The Lutheran Hour tells an anecdote concerning this justice. Evidently his honor was once on the train leaving Washington, D.C. when the conductor came by and found him looking everywhere for his ticket. The conductor tried to put the justice's mind to rest by telling him not fret for, said the conductor "*I know you and if you can't find your ticket now you can always send it to us later. That not my real problem*", replied the justice. "*What's really bothering me is that I don't know where 'i'm going!*"¹

¹ quote found in a message of There Lutheran Hour, *Form 55-N-1 Sept. 20, 1987*

What about you? Do you know where you are going? Are you sure you're on the right track? Which road map, and whose direction are you following?

The bible tells us of a person, who received a call, from heaven, actually, to go to a place, "He would later receive as his inheritance, the land of Canaan (Hebrews 11: 8). That man was Abraham, and you read about his and his family's journey both in the book of Genesis as well as in Hebrews.

In the latter we read of a marvelous, God-given gift called *faith*. A faith which was also Abraham's. Living by faith, is absolutely essential if you and I are to please the Lord! (Hebrews 11:6)

What does such a faith look like? Hebrews 11: 1 says it is being absolutely sure of what one hopes for. It's that kind of surety whereby you're certain even of what you don't , or don't *yet*, see! Yet it's not some vague wish, some groping in the dark. It's a sure expectation that's based on God's own word, his steadfast promises. Such a promise is itself a guarantee of its fulfilment. That's because God's promises are not fickle. They don't fail but they're true.

In verse 8 and following of Hebrews 11 we read God's revelation as to how Abraham responded when God called him to leave his country of origin and to go to what amounted to the promised land.

It says that Abraham "*Obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going.*" (11: 8b) To be sure he knew his final destination, the land of Canaan for his father Terah had already taken

him and other members of the family from Ur of the Chaldeans (today we would say, Iraq or east Syria) to go to Canaan. (Genesis 11: 31).

He went, without knowing the details of what would be a very long sojourn. No GPS, but something far more reliable, - God's call, God's promise and God's Word. He went, together with his wife Sarai and his nephew Lot as well as all their accumulated possessions.

The bible tells us that when he got there he actually didn't know he had arrived. He lived in tents, having no continuing city. Not only that but the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, were an idolatrous people who didn't know the Lord and who could hardly be expected to be friendly and to move over for Abraham.

But Abraham lived and acted on faith in God while treasuring God's promises. He lived on those promises! He wasn't looking for an acreage that he could develop into an empire while building a city. Someone has pointed out that he never bought any land except a cemetery plot where he could bury his beloved Sarah! Yet, says Hebrews 11: 10 “ *He was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.*”

Dear listeners, *that* city can only be seen by faith! It was not some Canaanite city, with a plurality of heathen temples, inhabited by gods that were the figments of man's warped imagination. No, this city Abraham was looking forward to, was *the city of God's promise*, the heavenly Jerusalem, that one day will come down and be inhabited by all true Christian believers on a new earth, cleansed from all unrighteousness. Abraham's heart was already in that city as he placed his hopes there by faith in God.

If you and I are going to persevere in the Christian life, then we too must fix our eyes on that city. Yet it is not a city to which all people belong and to which all have entrance. Only those who belong to Jesus Christ, who together with the Father and the Holy Spirit is the One, True and Eternal God. Faith in Jesus Christ is faith in God. It is believing in the One who was born to die on Calvary's cross. The One who, while he was on earth said in no uncertain terms, " I am the way and the truth and the life." (John 14:6)

In the next chapter (12) of this powerful letter to the Hebrews Christ is called the Author and the Perfecter of our faith. (ch. 12:2 NIV). Are you one of those who, though alive, is really lost? Or, are you searching for that straight path, that will not leave you trekking in the dark, going in circles without a true goal that will bring joy to your life?

The Lord Jesus Christ says, " *Come to me,*". "Be embraced by my love in the way of putting your hope and trust, your faith in me!" Abraham did so, from afar! Abraham had a difficult journey. But he was sustained, carried, if you like by that God in who he hoped and trusted and whose promises he accepted as true and reliable. Yes, along the way he was severely tested by God. God once even told him to sacrifice his son Isaac on an altar.

Abraham was prepaid to do even that, for, as we can read in v. 19 of Hebrews 11, " He reasoned that God could raise the dead. " And yes, " Figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death." . God providing a substitute, a ram as we can read in Genesis 22, which Abraham sacrificed in place of his son!

Yes Abraham knew where he was going. He lived by faith even though it was hundreds of years before Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God was born and died. Abraham banked on God. He obeyed God, and that my friends is the only way to go. For God does not change and Jesus Christ who came into the world to save people who had lost the way is the same yesterday and today and forever!

Did God come to Abraham and did he say to him at the outset of his journey, “ *I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you.*” ? (Genesis 12:2). Abraham *believed God* and the bible says “ *It was credited to him as righteousness*” (Genesis 15:6; Romans 4:3, 8:31). That’s the most wonderful credit a person can ever possess, for it indicates life, even eternal life in the forgiveness of one’s sins and a restored, a fricht relationship with God, forever!

The way of faith, is a very good road to travel. It was for Abraham and it is for everyone who believes. It is a road on which travellers follow that star which is Jesus Christ. Faith is his gift, his doing, his treasure which he is able to work in your heart and in mine. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, forgetting about the shame. Now he sits at the right hand of God on high. In power and glory. Submit your life, your love, to Him . And he will surely make your path,.... straight.

Amen, and thanks so much for listening.

