

Blind Faith

Romans 4:13-25

My mom has a saying when times get hard. She says, “God will provide.” I never really thought about what that meant when she would say it to me as a child. In fact, I don’t think I put much thought into it when at age thirteen our lives were uprooted by a messy divorce and my mom continued to say “God will provide.” The first time I remember acknowledging the saying was when I began looking at colleges my senior year of high school. From a single parent household, with a mother who didn’t make much more than what it took to put a roof over my head and food on our table, the idea of college felt out of reach. I remember telling my mom that I would just go to community college, I would live at home and take on a second job. I remember saying that college was just too expensive. And of course my mom chimed in with her usual “God will provide.” Only this time it was not the calming saying it had always been, I couldn’t understand how my mom could just trust that God would find the answer or that God would find me a big scholarship or that God had anything to do with it. Looking back, I don’t think that my mom believed that God would physically provide. I think she means that when we have faith in God, we know that we are supported and it makes us brave enough to do the things that scare us most. And so at 18, as many children of single parents do, I did what it took to make my mom happy, I applied for a four year university a few hours away from home. It was the only place I applied and really it was halfhearted. And a month later when the acceptance letter came, I was not quick to celebrate. My number one concern was how I could possibly pay for it. When the financial aid letter came and I saw that I had been awarded an almost full ride my mom and I were ecstatic, we called all of our family members, we told the neighbors, and of course, my mom reminded me, “See, God always provides.”

My mom has the kind of faith that I crave, a pure trust in God, some would call it “Blind Faith.” She needs no evidence. She trusts that God will see us through anything. My mom has the kind of faith that we heard about in the first reading this morning. The faith that Abraham and Sarah have that despite their old age, despite broken down bodies, that they will be the parents of many nations, the parents of us all. We hear about the faithful couple again in our second reading from Paul’s Letter to the Romans. I want to take a moment to explain a bit about this letter so that we can understand just how important the faith of Abraham and Sarah was and why Paul chose them for his example. You see, the Roman people, including both Gentiles and Jews, were not following the laws and to a leader like Paul this was embarrassing, they seemingly lacked righteousness. But Paul’s real embarrassment was not with the lawlessness, breaking the laws was not what brought righteousness to the Romans. Faith is what they were lacking. Every Jew would have known the story of Abraham and Sarah and so Paul reminds them of the great role models they have for faith. And if anyone were to assume that Paul was speaking only to the Jews, Paul reminds us at the tail end of this reading that righteousness will be reckoned to anyone who believes. Anyone who has faith will be righteous. In the midst of all of this lawlessness and lacking in righteousness, both Jewish and Gentile believers needed a reminder of what true faith looked like. Paul reminds them that Abraham did not become the great father through following the laws, he became the great father by having an unshakeable faith in God. He had hope against all hope that God would make his descendants many.

As we read this text today, we are all called to have that same unshakeable faith. But how on earth are we supposed to have faith like that? How in this world full of questions are we supposed to just blindly believe? I end up with more questions the more I think about it.

Lucky for me and as I told you so from my mom, God provided. As I began to prepare for this sermon I had no idea what I would say, all I knew was that this idea of Blind Faith was something I was struggling with, I craved solid evidence and from many conversations with our confirmands I knew they were wondering too. And of course just as I was about to give up one of my classes had a session on the very subject. We watched a video of three men being interviewed by a theologian. The three men were Oxford professors and also happened to be Christian scholars. Each of them had a primary field that had nothing to do with religion. They included a mathematician, a philosopher and a biologist. Each were asked, “Is Christian faith blind? Can faith have evidence? and Can it be reasonable?” Their answers were profound and extremely helpful for me as I wrestled with the same questions.

I suppose the best way to answer any question is to first understand the vocabulary that we are working with. One scholar explained that the word “faith” comes from the Latin word “Fide” which has other options for definition than faith. It can also mean trust, loyalty, and commitment in evidence. Without looking at a dictionary for a definition, one could also answer that faith is a way to make sense of the world around you. But in a world that requires proof for something to be real or true, where does faith fit in? Is it just that where you cannot seem to find proof you say that is where God is? Do you have to just blindly believe that there is some higher power out there floating around out there?

For some, like my mom, faith without proof comes naturally or comes with experience. For me I not so secretly wish for proof. My answer for today is instead that my faith is not blind but is a commitment to God that comes from a gathering of evidence that points me in the direction of God. Which probably sounds like a crazy mumbo jumbo way of saying “I still have no idea.” But I do have some idea. One of the scholars in the video quoted the Danish philosopher Soren

Kierkegaard who said, "Faith is a passionate commitment made in what is objectively uncertain." I'll say it again to let it sink in. Meaning that at some point we have to abandon the notion of trying to prove that there is a God. At some point we have to stop searching for the absolute proof and instead look at all of the evidence around us that points to the fact that God exists. Sisters and Brothers if faith is gathering evidence that there is a God, then we don't have to look very far for it is with the lens of a believer that we search for the proof, the evidence is easy to find when it is what we want to find. We can look around this room and see all of these people gathered here together at Northminster when we could just as easily be elsewhere on a Sunday morning. We can listen to the choir and know that music speaks to the soul. We can look at the beauty we find in nature, a sunrise or a sunset, the silence that comes with a fresh coat of snow, soft and pure, towering mountains ranges, and beautiful blues of the lake on summer days. Just remember the joy of children running forward for a children's sermon or the look on a baby's face when it hears a familiar voice. The look on a groom's face when he sees his bride coming toward him. Remember what a smile and a hug can do on a bad or lonely day. Or think about Abraham and Sarah from our readings today. In the face of old age and barrenness they believed and became the parents of many nations. They hoped beyond all hope. They trusted God. And they did not trust God in blindness; they trusted God based on the promise that was made to them, based on the evidence of experiencing God first hand. How can there not be a God in these things? How can we not have faith?

Look around at all of this evidence of God. We need not be blindly faithful. We have the evidence all around us, all we have to do is look for it and know that it points us to God. All we have to do is commit to trusting the evidence of God. Friends look around at all of this that God provided. Amen.

Link to the video I mentioned: <http://youtu.be/GRRQBD4yqcw>