

Patience and Perseverance

Genesis 15: 1-6

Hebrews 11: 1-3, 8-16

August 7, 2022

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Genesis 15: 1-6

After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, “Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.”

But Abram said, “O Lord GOD, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?” And Abram said, “You have given me no offspring, and so a slave born in my house is to be my heir.” But the word of the LORD came to him, “This man shall not be your heir; no one but your very own issue shall be your heir.” He brought him outside and said, “Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your descendants be.” And he believed the LORD; and the LORD reckoned it to him as righteousness.

Hebrews 11: 1-3, 8-16

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. Indeed, by faith our ancestors received approval. By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible.

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to set out for a place that he was to receive as an inheritance; and he set out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he stayed for a time in the land he had been promised, as in a foreign land, living in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he looked forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. By faith he received power of procreation, even though he was too old—and Sarah herself was barren—because he considered him faithful who had promised. Therefore from one person, and this one as good as dead, descendants were born, “as many as the stars of heaven and as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.” All of these died in faith without having received the promises, but from a distance they saw and greeted them. They confessed that they were strangers and foreigners on the earth, for people who speak in this way make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of the land that they had left behind, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; indeed, he has prepared a city for them.

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‘Discover Smith Church: Past, Present and Future. This was the theme of our 3rd place award parade float just a few weeks ago. We looked to the past through the first minister of Smith Church—Rev Seth Farnsworth, when we were then known as the Hillsborough Bridge Village Community Church. We looked to the more recent past as we honored some of the many things that have made us known in Hillsboro for generations: our clock tower, the Harvest Supper, the Cookie Walk, and our Prayer Shawl ministry.

When we gather for worship on Aug 21 at the Center Church – our 253 year old Mother Church—and help to celebrate Hillsboro’s 250th birthday--we will connect to our faith history past through singing from an older hymnal, listening to a pump organ, and some of our worship

liturgy will be from the King James bible, as we also remember that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and today, and forever.

While we often look to the past romantically and through the many tangibles, we gain more by looking at the intangibles of our past and with eyes and minds open to the challenges they faced as a church and as a community, and to the patient faith and the perseverance that carried them through turmoil and hardships so that we, their faith descendants would be, could be, here now.

Our Smith Church ancestors gathered for worship with greetings and by sharing the peace of Christ—sometimes easily, sometimes having to put aside tensions with one another. They celebrated birthdays and weddings and holidays and special occasions and honored life passages. They rejoiced together. They cried together. They sang many of the same hymns we still sing today. They raised their prayer concerns lifting to God their cares and worries for the health of family and friends, or for themselves, for the problems of the town, the nation, the world, and their joys for blessings received.

We can easily imagine prayer concerns raised for the abolition of slavery, for the segregation by Jim Crow laws and the brutal and murderous hatred by the KKK, for the painful losses and politics of the Civil War, for the grieving nation following the assassination of Abraham Lincoln, for the grief of the stock market crash and the Great Depression, for the devastation of two world wars and the dropping of atomic bombs, and for the unspeakable horrors of the Holocaust.

We can easily imagine prayers joyfully raised for the Emancipation Proclamation, for the end of wars and the homecoming of loved ones who served, and for the messages of hope from an FDR fireside chat.

Just like us today our Smith Church ancestors prayed through the challenges, the grief, the losses of a pandemic, knowing what it was like to be distanced and masked and watching healthy loved ones become suddenly and seriously ill.

It is our human nature, human tendency, to see the firsthand events and problems of our own times as being especially challenging or momentous, making it is easy to overlook what the generations before us had to cope with and overcome. Occasions such as a town birthday and our part in the history gift us with both inspiring and humbling opportunities to look back and learn from the faith ancestors who gathered here, worshipped here, met in fellowship and ministry, before us, to be reminded that they too experienced times of restlessness, discouragement, doubt or anxiety at one time or another for the world around them. The details are always changing yet their prayers and our prayers are so often rooted in man's inhumanity to man.

Those who sat and worshipped in these pews long before we were born saw a world in upheaval around them, saw political divisions that tore the country apart, terrors that tore the world apart, saw greed and fear deny justice and equality, yet they were faithfully patient and persevering. Their patience and perseverance still speak to us today in our times, in our divisions, in our challenges, and encourage us in our need for faithful patience and perseverance. Our faith ancestors lived into the well known and beloved words from the writer of Hebrews as he spoke of our shared ancient faith ancestors: "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. Indeed, by faith our ancestors received approval. By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible."

These poetic words teach a rich and deep lesson about the steadfast nature of faith. A faith that is steadfast is an 'overcoming faith'. The very idea of a steadfast faith implies that it is

being attacked, and that there is something trying to overcome it. As German theologian Gerhard Ebling said, “Faith would cease to be faith if it were not threatened.” Faith can be threatened by fear, anger, doubt or apathy, yet it is not the external circumstances, but our internal responses that make the ultimate difference between a strong and a weak faith, that allow us to push on with patience and perseverance.

In her book, *Developing Patience and Perseverance in an Impatient World: How Faith in God Can Build Christian Leaders at Home and Work With Patience, Perseverance, Determination, Persistence, Grit, and Character*¹, Susan Lee speaks of developing patience and perseverance in many ways, but one in particular that has been woven through our shared faith history, and that is ‘active patience.’

Unlike the traditional understanding of patience as passive, active patience requires action and intention as we wait for results.

Abraham and Sarah, faith ancestors of us all, who waited patiently, more than 25 years, more than a generation, for the fulfillment of God’s promise, knew well the difference between a strong faith and a weak faith, they knew about faithful patience and perseverance. As they endured they did so with an active patience which included planning that one of their slaves-- Eliezer –would become their heir. They were active in the moment but patient with the results, results that would become more numerous than all the stars in the sky, as innumerable as the grains of sand by the seashore, that would become us.

In their expectation of God’s promise to them to be fulfilled they showed us that faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen, as they waited on God’s promise with an active patience setting out for an unknown place that Abraham was to receive as an inheritance. From his tent he looked forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

For our Smith Church faith ancestors active patience meant taking an abolitionist stand against slavery as the Civil War raged on. It meant rejecting the beliefs of the KKK and protesting Jim Crow laws. It meant wearing masks to protect others from the flu. It meant actively working and praying for the changes that needed to come, to persevere in faith until the concerns were resolved.

For us today it means advocating for gun control that protects children in schools and those attending public gatherings, it means protesting the taking away of human rights, it means participating in ways of climate healing, as we persevere through the waiting for the day when these concerns are resolved.

Faithful patience and perseverance are at the core of our past, our present and our future. Amen.

¹ Lee, Susan. *Developing Patience and Perseverance in an Impatient World: How Faith in God Can Build Christian Leaders at Home and Work With Patience, Perseverance, Determination, Persistence, Grit, and Character*. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2013