

Walking in faith is a lifelong journey. As I look back over my life, I see many times when this has helped me get through some challenging times, such as the death of my father while I was still in high school, going off to college, the many moves that Judy and I made over my Federal career, 911, and especially since I entered the ministry. Each church that I have served has required stepping out in faith. However, I have become more aware of it over the last year as we have gone through the process of relocating here to Golf Course Road and now as we have had to suspend meeting together due to the coronavirus.

On our first Sunday at our new location, I preached on “walking in faith” using the text from 2 Corinthians 5:7 which states: “For we walk by faith, not by sight.” The *Message* paraphrases it as follows: “It’s what we trust in but don’t yet see that keeps us going.” In that message, I asked the question: “So what have I learned so far about walking in faith?” Notice that I said “so far,” because I’m still learning; I’m still trying to walk in faith. As I said, walking in faith is a lifelong journey. Each and every day we are given new opportunities to learn something and to grow closer to the Lord.

In my previous message on February 2nd, I listed some of the lessons that I had learned so far as we went through the year long process of relocating the church. These included staying in touch with God through a daily quiet time of prayer and Bible reading, prayer accompanied by action, not getting discouraged and staying focused on your objective, and God has a plan for this church. All we have to do is keep walking in faith.

Now there are many references to faith in the Bible, and one of the most familiar ones is in the eleventh chapter of the Book of Hebrews which is often referred to as “The Faith Chapter.” Chapter 11 provides us with an impressive overview of biblical faith, from those who passed through the Red Sea all the way down to the martyrs of the early church; it is a virtual hall of fame of those Biblical characters who have walked in faith. Listen to this rollcall of the faithful as found in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews, the first sixteen verses.

Read Hebrews 11:1-16

The first verse gives us an excellent definition of faith: “Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.” We have all been hoping that this nightmare of the coronavirus will soon be over and that life will somehow get back to normal. While we don’t see it yet, we have faith that through God’s grace this will happen.

So what have I learned so far or I am still learning from these past weeks of uncertainty and isolation? What are the lessons that God wants us to learn from this experience? First, there appears to be a lot of fear and panic in our country right now. We are afraid of catching the

virus, of the economic impact on our lives and the country, of losing our jobs, and of an uncertain future. Fear is a natural part of Life. It defines our lives in many ways. The letters in F-E-A-R can stand for “False Expectations Appearing Real.” Remember Franklin D. Roosevelt’s famous statement during World War II: “The only thing we have to fear is fear itself.” Someone said that we should not fear tomorrow, because God is already there.

Faith in God is the Christian response to fear. One of the most frequent quotes throughout the Bible is: “Do not be afraid.” From the mouths of prophets and angels these words provide encouragement throughout the Bible from God to His children. In Isaiah 41:10, God says: “Fear not, for I am with you: do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous hand.” In John 14:27, Jesus assures us with these words: “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.” I heard one preacher on TV say: “Pray, don’t panic.”

Jesus promised in Matthew 28:20 that He would be with us even to the end of time. Because of this we have hope as we face whatever life throws our way, such as the coronavirus. Now God may not deliver us from whatever situation we are in, but He promises to be with us no matter what we are facing. In Psalm 55:22 King David writes: “Cast your burdens on the Lord, and He will sustain you.” He didn’t say: “Cast your burdens on the Lord and He will immediately fix everything that troubles you.” He says that God will sustain you, support you, and help you endure. Remember God is with us; He is in control; and He will get us through this crisis.

The thought of God watching over us reminds me of a church luncheon that I heard about. In the buffet line next to the apples there was a sign that said: “Apples – take one per person. Remember God is watching.” A little farther down the line next to the cookies, someone had written with a canyon: “Cookies – take all you want. God’s watching the apples.”

Now some of this fear and panic is fueled by the media; let’s face it bad news sells. It appears that the pessimists are in charge right now; they are the ones with the microphone. Have you noticed that the commercials on TV are more positive than the news, especially if you want to buy a new car with money that you don’t have. There was a man who was in the hospital recovering from a heart attack with his wife sitting beside him. He turns to her and says: “Mildred, being in the hospital the past few days, I have had time to reflect on my life. When I fell off the roof and broke my leg, you were there. When I got hit by that car, you were there. When the dog bite me, you were there. When I lost my job, you were there. I have come to one conclusion, Mildred; you’re bad luck!”

Chuck Swindoll said that the longer he lived the more he had become convinced that life is 10 percent what happens to us and 90 percent how we respond to it. The most significant

decision we can make each and every day is our choice of attitude. It is more important than our past, our education, our successes or failures, our current situation, what other people think of us or say about us. Our attitude can either keep us going or cripple us with fear. A positive attitude is essential for remaining calm and at peace during this difficult time.

You know we can become so preoccupied with the daily news that we fail to see God's hands at work all around us during this crisis. People are helping and looking out for each other as never before; we are truly fulfilling Jesus' command to love our neighbors. Just look within our own congregation: the Pantry is staying open and feeding people; members are taking meals to seniors; we are calling each other to make sure everything is okay; taking groceries to homes; providing food packages to kids over the weekend, and feeding the homeless through the Interfaith Bible Center in the International Zone. All of us are making sacrifices for the good of others. And then there is the dedication of our doctors, nurses, medical staffs and first responders. God is truly at work in the hearts of His people.

I believe that Jesus was the ultimate optimist. Listen to what He said in John 16:33: "I have told you these things so that you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." My advice, for what's it worth, is watch the news to catch up on what's happening and for the facts, but don't become obsessed with it. In these times of social distancing and isolation we can become depressed and discouraged. So read the Bible or good books, and watch uplifting movies.

During this crisis, I have had to deal with one of my many shortcomings – my lack of patience. I am by nature an impatient person; I like to stay busy and get things done right away. As a matter of fact, one day during our self-isolation, Judy saw how bored I was just sitting around and said: "You can't ever retire, can you?" Waiting is not one of my strong suits. Does anyone else have this problem? We live in a microwave society. We are the people who invented instant everything: instant orange juice, instant mashed potatoes, instant reply, smart-phones, Minute Rice and fast food which is really a double oxymoron since so often it's not fast and food it never is! What we want, we want right now. You may have heard about the guy who prayed for patience and told the Lord that he wanted it "right now!"

But God calls us to walk in faith. Remember the words of the Apostle Paul in Romans 8:28 where he told us that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him; who walk in faith trusting in His promises. A visiting priest was attending a men's breakfast in the Ohio farm country. He asked one of the local farmers in attendance to say grace that morning. After all were seated, the old farmer began: "Lord, I hate buttermilk." The priest opened one eye and wondered to himself where this was going. Then the farmer loudly proclaimed: "Lord, I hate lard." Now the priest was getting worried. However, without missing a beat, the farmer prayed on: "And Lord, you know that I don't care much for raw white flour." Just as the priest

was about to stand up and stop everything, the farmer continued: “But Lord, when you mix ‘em all together and bake ‘em up, I do love fresh biscuits. So Lord, when things come up that we don’t like, when life gets hard, when we don’t understand what You are saying to us, we just need to relax and wait until You have done mixing, and probably it will be something even better than biscuits. Amen.” The point is that God works all things out in His time for His children; we just need to walk in faith.

Another lesson is that we don’t really need all that stuff we thought we needed; in reality we can get by with far less. Think about it, do you really need 100 rolls of toilet paper, eating takeout every night, ordering something from Amazon every day. One of the advantages of the shelves at the grocery store not being fully stocked or having your groceries delivered is that you don’t do impulse buying. You know, you see something and think: I might eat that or I could use that. Judy hates it when she sends me to the store because I always come back with more than was on her grocery list.

We live in a world where bigger is better: bigger houses, bigger and faster cars, the latest smart phones, the latest advances in technology, appliances that can do everything but wash the windows. We have to have what our neighbors have; you know the old saying “keeping up with the Jones.” This attitude is spelled out in a bumper sticker that read: “The one who dies with the most toys wins.” We live under the false assumption that the more we have the happier we will be. We think that if I only had that I would be happy.

During this time of social-distancing and staying at home, many of us have learned what the Apostle Paul meant when he wrote in Philippians 4:11 – “I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances.” Paul is basing this assurance on Jesus’ promise in Matthew 6:33 – “Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” Here the phrase “all these things” refers to what we need to eat, drink, wear, our basic daily needs. Jesus was teaching that if we put our focus on serving Him and growing spiritually, God will take care of our basic material needs. This is what we pray for in the Lord’s Prayer when we say: “Give us this day our daily bread.” Here Jesus is promising to supply our basic needs, not our greed; our daily bread, not cake! Over the past few weeks, I think we have learned that most of us have far more than we need, and that we can get by with less. Let’s face it, the simple life is better!

A few weeks ago Dolly Parton offered these encouraging words on the internet: “I think that God is trying to hold us up to the light so that we can see ourselves and see each other through the eyes of love, and I hope that we learn that lesson. I think that when this passes we are all gonna be better people.” You know they say you should always look for something good in all situations; look for the silver lining. One thing that I have seen in this self-isolation is that families are spending more time together. Prior to the virus, families were always on the move

going from one ball practice or event to another. Even when the family went out for dinner, they would all be sitting around the table on their smart phones. Kids are now getting more quality time with their parents.

I have also noticed that people are a lot friendlier; as I noted earlier we are doing a better job at loving our neighbor. The head of our Baseball Little League sent out a recent message on the status of future games. He closed his message by stressing that we should continue to follow the physical distancing requirements. He said that he purposely did not call it social distancing since as a society we do not need to distance ourselves socially, just physically. I hope that as we look back over this crisis, we can all see that as a nation and as children of the Lord God we learned how to better love one another. And hopefully, this is a lesson that we will never forget to practice. Amen