



Saint John United Methodist Church
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Message for May 28, 2023
"By Faith.Moses"
Speaker: Pastor Tom Grieb
Scripture: Hebrews

Today's Short Attention Spans

In an age of sound bites, Twitter, and Instagram, even a 30-second commercial seems long. Our attention spans are growing increasingly shorter. Brevity is the order of the day. We figure the shorter the better.

I ran across a news service the other day on the internet called, *Two Paragraphs*. I suppose it's the site where no article is more than two paragraphs long. That's just the way it is these days.

It used to be that in writing a sermon they'd say, "*Have a strong introduction, a rousing conclusion, and three salient points.*" I guess that's about all you can hope to accomplish in twenty minutes or so. I hate to disappoint you but today we're going to have five points. I promise to get you out on time though.

The five points I am talking about mirror what Hebrews 11 has to say about Moses. Not surprisingly, he too is prominently mentioned in the Hall of Faith we have been talking about for the past few weeks. In fact, there is more written about Moses in Hebrews 11 than any other Old Testament character, including Abraham and Sarah.

The scripture teaches that Moses lived to be 120 years old. His life is loosely divided in three forty-year segments:

- His time in Pharaoh's court.
- His time in Midian.
- And the time he spent leading the children of Israel out of Egypt and their subsequent journey in the wilderness.

Moses' life was one of a developing faith. Hopefully, it's that way for us. Faith is best developed through the experiences of life.

Since this is a sermon with five sections, let's get to it.

We read today, Hebrews 11:23-29. You will notice the writer precedes each of these sections with the words, "*By faith.*"

Hebrews 11:23-29

By faith Moses' parents hid him for three months after he was born, because they saw he was no ordinary child, and they were not afraid of the king's edict.

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. He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward.

By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the king's anger; he persevered because he saw him who is invisible.

By faith he kept the Passover and the application of blood, so that the destroyer of the firstborn would not touch the firstborn of Israel.

By faith the people passed through the Red Sea as on dry land; but when the Egyptians tried to do so, they were drowned.

This is the word of the Lord.

Parenting

The first of the sections that reference Moses' faith has more to do with his parents' faith than it does Moses'. Hear it again:

By faith Moses' parents hid him for three months after he was born, because they saw he was no ordinary child, and they were not afraid of the king's edict.

This short verse highlights the wonderful first chapters of Moses' life, and the faith of his parents.

Down through the years I have highlighted the virtues of Moses' mom on Mother's Day. Hers is testimony to a mother's deep love for her child. She is the epitome of a mother's faith that trusts God to provide and protect.

Many of you have known the story since your Sunday School days. Feeling threatened by the Hebrews, Pharaoh sent out an edict that all male Hebrew babies were to be slaughtered. Talk about genocide. All that gets somewhat glossed over in children's Sunday School. What's highlighted, though, is the faith of Moses' mom to release her child into the hands of the Egyptians so Moses would have a chance to grow and prosper.

The story is quite touching. His mother builds a little ark out of papyrus and pitch and sets Moses afloat on the Nile at the exact time Pharaoh's daughter is bathing. She even has her daughter stand to watch to make sure everything goes according to plan.

Raising a child in a rough and tumble world, filled with all sorts of dangers, is not at all easy. Like with all challenges, such things are best met with a deep faith in God who every desire is to protect and provide. That sort of faith always involves letting go. I have often described parenting as a continual process of letting go.

This weekend bears witness to that. There is nothing like graduation season to bring home that point. Teaching a child to ride a bike does as well. Eventually, the training wheels come off, you run alongside, and sooner or later let go. Who among us hasn't prayed in that moment?

In the case of Moses, the faith of his parents laid the foundation for the life of faith he would later lead.

Standing

The next section the writer of Hebrews highlights is the way Moses stood strong, holding to his identity as a Hebrew.

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.*

Even though Moses had been reared in the courts of Pharaoh and, quite honestly, had risen to prominence, he never forgot his roots. This was on full display the day Moses came upon an Egyptian beating one of the Hebrew slaves. Moses would not stand idly by. He stepped in and killed the Egyptian.

Not to gloss over, or even excuse his rage, at least Moses clung to his roots. Clearly, he had had enough of the abuses perpetrated upon the Hebrew slaves. He refused to be party to those abuses any longer, so he acted.

The writer of Hebrews has it that Moses gave up a lot in claiming his identity as a Hebrew and for acting as he did. Moses had a lot to lose and that's exactly what happened.

Standing strong with faith often means that we too will sustain loss. When it comes to faith, we give up so we might gain.

Stephen, in defending himself right before his stoning in Act 7:20-44, references Moses quite a bit.

Regarding Moses avenging the mistreatment of the Hebrew slave, Stephen asserts that *"Moses thought that his own people would realize that God was using him to rescue them, but they did not."* (Acts 7:25)

A lot would need to transpire before that would happen. Moses' faith would need to be developed more deeply, much deeper than he could ever imagine. All of that would take place in faraway Midian.

Persevering

The third section the writer of Hebrews highlights references the way Moses was formed and fashioned in Midian. While the writer offers only one verse on the subject, it represents nearly forty years of Moses' life.

By faith *he left Egypt, not fearing the king's anger; he persevered because he saw him who is invisible.*

Moses did, in fact, leave Egypt. There were enough witnesses to what he had done that forced him to *"get out of Dodge."* In fact, Moses went with due haste to Midian, which was in the middle of nowhere. He spent his life tending sheep. He married there and raised a family.

All the while, God heard the cries of his people who were suffering mightily at the hands of the Egyptians. God didn't just hear but was ready to act.

The writer of Hebrews has Moses' persevering in Midian. Faraway from Egypt God was forming Moses for the task that lay before him. Meeting the Lord in a burning bush will do that every time. While Moses offered every excuse in the book, God wouldn't let him off the hook.

Moses was chosen to lead God's people out of bondage. Talk about needing faith. Faith was the only thing that allowed him to persevere.

We too are to persevere. The writer of Hebrews encourages us to throw off everything that hinders us so we might *"run with perseverance the race marked out before us,"* wherever that race might take us.

Running with perseverance was the very thing the writer of Hebrews wanted to get across to those who first read his letter. They were people under persecution. The long list of the faithful in Hebrews 11 was intended to lift their spirits, inspire them to be faithful, and help them persevere.

Only by faith will we be able to persevere. Faith is the very thing that keeps our gaze looking forward. It also keeps it on the One who will see us through.

Believing

The fourth section highlights Moses' return to Egypt. By faith then Moses was able to return and stare down Pharaoh. He promised one plague after another to force Pharaoh's hand into freeing the Hebrews from bondage. Finally, things came down to a showdown over family. The death of every first-born son would be the cost exacted for refusing to let the Hebrews go.

The Hebrews got a reprieve. They were instructed to place the blood of an unblemished lamb over the doors of their homes so when the angel of death passed over, they would be spared.

By faith he kept the Passover and the application of blood, so that the destroyer of the firstborn would not touch the firstborn of Israel.

We learned about Passover during our Seder Meal on Maundy Thursday night. God was gracious to the Hebrews and set the stage for their exodus. We rehearse the story of Passover at least one every year.

- It serves as the backdrop of the last week of Christ's life.
- It was the occasion where Christ talked with his disciples about his impending death.
- It forms the basis for our Sacrament of Holy Communion.

To have lived through the first Passover would have taken a great deal of faith. It took a great deal of faith for Moses to have delivered the news about what was going to happen, not only to the Egyptians, but to the Hebrews as well. It took a lot of faith for the Hebrews to have lived through that fateful night. I am sure all concerned clutched their youngsters for dear life.

Believing keeps our gaze on God and sees us through!

Just this past week I read from the devotional book, *Jesus Calling* these important words, *"Every person on the planet faces gaping jaws of uncertainty. The antidote to this poisonous threat is drawing closer to Me. In my presence you can face uncertainty with perfect peace."*

Believing makes all the difference in the world.

Overcoming

Here we are at number five. To put it in the parlance of the Kentucky Derby, *"And down the stretch they come."*

By faith the people passed through the Red Sea as on dry land; but when the Egyptians tried to do so, they were drowned.

The waters would part, and the people would pass through to the other side. Talk about living by faith. Stepping forward into what had just been covered by water demanded nothing short of an unflinching faith in God. To have walked through that dry bed with water looming on both sides took nothing but trust in the One who had brought them thus far.

You may have heard the expression, *“God has brought me this far, why would he stop now?”*

The Hebrews, with God’s help, were overcoming not only their bondage in Egypt, but any fears they might have had about moving forward. As much as their faith would waver in the wilderness, they would constantly remember what God had done. Eventually, by faith, they would overcome all the way to the Promised Land.

Five Points about Living by Faith

I used to do a daily radio spot on 84WHAS when I was at St. Paul. Each spot had to be exactly a minute. I found it took about a minute ten seconds to develop a point. I spent so much time trying to shave off those ten seconds.

Today, we made through not just one point, but five and, by so doing, have been reminded about the importance of living by faith, just like Moses did. Let me encourage you to dig more deeply into the life of this great hero of the faith.

Let me also encourage to live by faith by:

- Parenting rightly.
- Standing strongly.
- Persevering courageously.
- Believing unreservedly.
- And overcoming victoriously.