

Text: Hebrews 11:1-16

Especially verse 1 – Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.”

Theme: “It is Faith that Gives Hope in a World of Trouble”

The news reports last week were filled with stories about the horrific shootings that took place last weekend in Texas and Ohio. In only a few seconds dozens of lives were tragically lost. Every day our local newspaper has several news brief on the latest shooting victims in Milwaukee. There are so many that they don't even make the headlines anymore. While there might be things that our legislators can do to better protect our society from this violence, and I don't want to make any excuses for those who attack the lives of other people, I have seen a common thread in all these shootings - whether they be the mass shootings, the urban shootings or the two horrific shootings that took place within the last year in northern Wisconsin. They all seem to be committed by young men who have no hope. As I said, it can be debated what the best ways are to protect society, but the only thing that will give hope in this world of trouble is faith in Christ our Savior.

I. Trouble and trauma themselves do not take away our hope.

This chapter of Hebrews describes many people who went through a lot of trauma. It speaks of Abel, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses' parents, Moses, Rahab and many other heroes of faith in the Old Testament. It says that some of them were tortured. Others faced jeers and flogging, while others were chained and put in prison. They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They were destitute, persecuted and mistreated. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground. The heroes of faith in the Bible did not have an easy life. Many of them endured tremendous suffering. Other times God asked them to do things that seemed foolish such as Abraham believed that he would have a son in his old age, Noah built an ark or Israel march around the walls of Jericho so that they would fall. These people had trouble and trauma in their lives, but they also had hope.

I have also seen that in my ministry. The older people of my first church had experienced some of the most horrific things that I have ever heard. They were Germans in the Eastern part of Europe as the Soviet armies advanced at the end of World War 2. Mrs. Lieb's husband was dragged out of the house and killed. Mrs. Mueller's children starved in one of Tito's concentration camps. Another woman woke as a child in a cattle car and realized that her mother had frozen to death as they fled from the Red Army. All of those people I ministered to were scarred in some way for the rest of their lives, but they all had hope. They would eventually lead productive lives.

I think of our Hmong and French African brothers and sisters. Pastor Blong lost his father in the Vietnam War. Then at the age of 12 his mother sent him away to a refugee camp to save his life. After the Americans left Vietnam, many of the Hmong hid in the jungle until they were able to make it to Thailand. There are still scars, but they have hope, and I marvel at how our Hmong friends are succeeding today.

I think of a family from our French African ministry who fled from the genocide in Rwanda. They came to this country after several years at a refugee camp. A couple of Christmases ago, the father asked if I would come to their home on Christmas Eve to say a prayer of thanksgiving for all the

blessings that God gave to them in their new country. They are active members of the French African ministry, the parents have good jobs, and the children are in college. They are so thankful for God's mercy.

At Germanfest, I spent a lot of time talking with a German professor from UW. He is Mennonite. If you know anything about the Mennonites and Anabaptist movement at the time of the Reformation, they were harshly persecuted from every side. Yet, they are some of the most peaceful people in the world today. The horrible things that their ancestors endured could not take their hope in Christ from them.

II. It is faith in Christ, which gives us this hope.

That is what the heroes of faith all had. We heard that famous passage, "*Abraham believed God, and it was credited to Him as righteousness.*" (*Gn 15:5*) In a difficult time, the prophet Habakkuk was told, "*The righteous will live by His faith.*" It was by faith that Noah built the ark, that Abel offered his sacrifices, that Abraham moved to the promised land or that Rahab hid the spies. In the most difficult days of their lives, they believed the promises of God. They had the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not yet seen because God promised it.

It is the faith of the people in the congregations that I have served that has gotten them through troubling times. I spoke about Mrs. Lieb, whose husband was taken from the home and killed. I will never forget a day toward the end of her life. She had suffered from Alzheimer's and just had a stroke. She could barely move, but she held my hand as tight as she could and said almost every Bible and hymn verse with me as I ministered to her in the hospital. She was still filled with hope in her Savior.

If you have ever been to our French African worship service, it is where those people want to be on Sunday. They want to gather to hear God's Word and praise Him for all of His goodness to us.

I will never forget the day when three young Hmong men were killed in a car accident on Capitol Drive several years ago. The next evening a large group of us stood on that corner, singing hymns that declared God's grace and mercy to us.

I even think of some of our heroes of faith at Benediction, such as Barb Strelitzer and Leesa Bahr and how they were examples of faith to us in their time of grave illness.

It is that kind of faith, which we all need. God promises us great things through Jesus Christ our Lord. He promises to forgive our sins. Think of those wonderful words of St. Paul in Romans 8:1, "*There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*" We live in faith that He bore our sins on the cross and clothes us with His righteousness. We live in the peace of Psalm 46:1, "*God is our refuge and strength an ever present help in trouble.*" Our Lord is our hiding place in which we can seek refuge in all of the trials of this life. The past couple of weeks, I have grieved with a number of people who lost loved ones. Then we think of Jesus' words in John 11, "*I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?*" With Martha we cannot help but answer, "*Yes Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world.*" We trust in Christ's redeeming love for

us. It as we pray at the end of the Lord's Prayer, "But deliver us from evil." That faith fills our hearts with hope.

III. But this is not a blind faith.

The word "hope" today means something like a wish, which probably won't come true. It's like hoping that we will win the lottery. But notice these two important words in Hebrews 11:1, "being sure and certain." Our hope as Christians is sure. It is sure because Jesus Christ rose from the dead. Because He lives, all of God's promises to us in Christ our true. Our sins are indeed forgiven, Christ is with us always, and He is preparing a place for us in heaven. We are sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. We live by faith, but God assures us of His faithfulness through His Word and Supper, that everything that He has promised us is true.

People today go through trouble and trauma, just like the people of every generation. The difference is when there is no faith or hope in Christ to combat the troubling things that we experience in the world, horrible and evil things fill our hearts instead. We see the fruits of that hopelessness all around us. As Christians it is more important than ever that we share the Gospel with the next generation, and that we pray that God's Spirit will work on all of our hearts, especially these young people who are at risk, that their hopelessness will give way to a sure and certain hope in Christ through faith in all of His promises to us.

Amen.

Prayer of the Church
Ninth Sunday after Pentecost
11 August 2019

Lord God, heavenly in a world that is full of trouble and trauma, you bring hope through faith in Jesus Christ our Savior. Bless the preaching of the Gospel in our day by the Power of your Spirit that hatred, fear, envy, and all evil will give way to faith, hope, and love in Christ our Lord. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord God, heavenly Father, give your aid to our president, governor, Congress, legislature, and all judges and magistrates. Make them wise and endow them with a good heart, that they may seek justice and show mercy, especially on behalf of the unborn and those least able to defend themselves. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord God, heavenly Father, be with those troubled in mind and heart. Give clarity to their thoughts and bring to an end the terrors of their minds, that they may know peace. Bless the counselors and hospitals that work to care for those who are a danger to themselves, and give to their families patience, endurance and courage. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord God, heavenly Father, You know our needs before we ask, and yet You invite us to pray for health and healing, comfort and consolation, and peace at the last. Deliver from suffering those who are sick, and bring the healthful Spirit of Your grace to all who cry to You for mercy *[especially _____]*. Grant to us the perfect consummation of our hope and the full healing of body and soul, when at last Your Son comes in His glory to deliver us to You forevermore. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord God, heavenly Father, though we can add nothing to the span of our lives, You have clothed us with Your grace and favor far beyond what we deserve or discern. Open our eyes to Your mercies, fill us with confident faith and teach us to rejoice in Your good gifts, that when we fall asleep into the arms of our Savior we may receive the eternal treasure that will not disappoint us. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Into Your hands, O Lord, we commend ourselves and all for whom we pray, knowing that You will hear the prayers of Your people and answer us with Your mercy, providing all things needful and beneficial for us through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.