

Sunday: August 8, 2010

Scripture: Isaiah 1:1,10-20
Hebrews 11:1-3

Sermon: "Unlimited Faith – Unlimited God"

Call to Worship: Selected verses from Psalm 50

The Mighty One, God, the Lord speaks and summons
the earth from the rising of the sun to the place where it sets.

Our God comes and will not be silent
God summons the heavens above, and the earth,
that God's people may be judged.

Gather to me my consecrated ones, who made a covenant
with me by sacrifice.

Hear, O my people, and I will speak
O Israel, and I will testify against you;
I am God, your God.

I do not rebuke you for your sacrifices or your burnt offerings,
I have no need of a bull or a goat, for every animal is mine,
The cattle of a thousand hills.

If I were hungry I would not tell you, for the world is
Mine and all that is in it.

Sacrifice thank offerings to God,

Fulfill your vows to the Most High

Call upon me in the day of trouble

I will deliver you and you will honor me.

Hymns: #464 Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee
#344 Christ of the Upward Way
#392 Take Thou Our Minds, Dear Lord

Prayer of Confession: Precious Lord, we come to you as simple human beings. We know only what we have experienced and we understand only what our minds can comprehend. We have limitations. But You, O Lord, are not limited. You have no boundaries. Our feeble minds sometimes put limits on you and we try to keep you in a box that is made up of our constricted insights and our personal needs. Forgive our shortsightedness and broaden our insights so that we can understand the immensity of your nature. Free us from our prejudices and teach us that Your Word has no boundaries or limitations just as your forgiveness and grace has no limits. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.

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Scripture: Isaiah 1:1,10-20
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Now Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for. By faith we understand the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.
Hebrews 11:1-3

On April 24, 1990 Space Shuttle Discovery opened its gigantic cargo bay doors and launched the Hubble Space Telescope into low orbit around the earth. This was the culmination of years of planning that actually goes back to 1923 when Hermann Oberth published an article entitled: Die Rakete zu den Planetenraum. The Rocket into Planetary Space. In which he suggested that a telescope could be propelled into Earth orbit by a rocket.

Plans for the Hubble Space Telescope began in 1946. Actual launching of the Hubble did not take place until 1990, delayed by the Challenger disaster in 1986. Today, scientists can sit in their comfortable laboratories in Greenbelt Maryland and monitor the data which the Hubble gathers 24 hours a day. There have been some glitches, such as the fact that the first lens was ground wrong and had to be replaced by a later shuttle mission. In all, five space shuttle missions have carried replacement parts to Hubble and countless space walks by our Astronauts have kept the Hubble producing astounding data and pictures of the far reaches of the universe.

And the pictures they have retrieved have been absolutely earth shaking. The reason I mention all this is because I believe that the more we explore the universe. The more we come to know about the earth upon which we live. The more we plunge into outer space and discover other galaxies and other suns and other planets. The more we come to realize that it is by Faith that we live.

As a matter of fact, the more we come to know about the vast expanse of Created Order, the more we can affirm that it was formed at the command of God. The author of the letter to the Hebrews writes: ***“ Now Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.”*** Just think about it for a moment. Who was it that could affirm this truth? Who was it that could follow these words with such a wide reaching statement as: ***“By faith we understand the universe was formed at Gods command.”***

Well it had to be someone of great intellectual capacity. Scholars have ruled out Paul as the author of this letter. Some of the side comments in this letter do not fit with Paul's life. Tertullian, one of the first theologians, writing about the year 200 expressed the idea that Barnabas could be the author. From the letter itself it is clear that the writer must have had authority in the early church and was an intellectual Hebrew Christian well versed in the OT. Barnabas meets these requirements.

Martin Luther suggested that the author of Hebrews was Apollos. Many contemporary scholars favor Apollos. He was a Jewish Christian and in the words of Luke “He was a learned man with a thorough knowledge of Scriptures” (Acts 18:24)

The reason for mentioning both of these suggestions is to emphasize the high level of intellectual acumen which the author of Hebrews exhibited. The author of Hebrews was someone who knew about the universe. Someone who had read the works of ancient and contemporary scholars. Someone who had a working knowledge of the universe as well as it was known in that day. Someone who had an intimate working knowledge of the ancient Hebrew texts.

Sometimes we hear folks say that learning is a detriment to Faith. I heard a parent say that they did not want their children to go off to college. It would only ruin them. “They go off to college and learn all that stuff that goes against their faith. Those professors are atheists who want to destroy the faith we have instilled in our children.” All I could do was cringe. My experience has been just the opposite. Some of the most Faith Filled people I have ever met have been professors, teachers and educators. They know the truth of what the Letter to the Hebrews is talking about.

BY FAITH WE UNDERSTAND THAT THE UNIVERSE WAS FORMED AT GOD’S COMMAND, SO THAT WHAT IS SEEN WAS NOT MADE OUT OF WHAT WAS VISIBLE. (Heb. 11:3)

Every time science makes an advance in understanding the universe, it uncovers hundreds of new questions and hundreds of new possibilities. And the only place that this new understanding can lead you is back to Faith. Many scientists are some of the most deeply religious individuals I know.

Back to the Hubble Space Telescope. How many of you caught the December 2009 issue of National Geographic. Now, of course National Geographic is not The Bible. It does not teach us about God, or about the Son of God or the Holy Spirit. National Geographic says nothing about salvation and forgiveness or the Grace of God. But in December of 2009 it asks the question: Are We Alone? I have wonderful memories of laying out in the middle of a field at Scout Camp when I was a teenager, soaking in the magnificent canopy of stars that stretched as far as the eye could see. There were no cities nearby to cast their lights upward to block the view. There were no dusk to dawn lights on nearby farm to blur the view. Just the magnificent spectacle of God’s created order. The North Star, the big and the little dipper. These were easy to find. Ursa the bear was a little more difficult, as were the twins and the bull. Astronomers say these images are up there, but it takes more imagination than I have to find them. What I did see very clearly was the milky way... an intense band of heavenly bodies that stretched across the sky like a band of sparkling rhinestones.

Hubble has expanded our knowledge of the Milky Way. Within the Milky Way scientists have found new stars.... Some larger than our Sun. And around these other suns planets have been found to rotate around their suns just like Earth circles our Sun in 365 days,

give or take a few hours. I wish you could see the pictures that Hubble has taken. Does that mean that there is life on one or more of these planets. We have no data to indicate that life exists anywhere else in God's expansive universe other than on Earth.

I can almost bet that the author of Hebrews wasn't thinking about life on other planets. He was thinking about life on this planet. The life that you and I have to live. No matter how vast our knowledge becomes, we always come back to one undeniable truth.

GOD DID IT ALL!

National Public Radio has a special feature called "This I Believe". Different folks spend about three minutes stating what they believe in. Some believe in truth... truth as they know it. Some believe in brotherhood. Some believe in Peace and Joy and Love. All of the things they believe in are defined by their experiences with God's created order. If I ever get a chance to do a segment of "This I Believe". I'm going to begin by saying, **I BELIEVE GOD DID IT ALL.... AND I BELIEVE THAT GOD IS CONTINUING TO DO IT ALL.**

God's Creative power is still at work. The universe is expanding at such a rate that it takes sophisticated equipment to measure the changes. The Hubble is opening up new vistas in the heavens and now the Kepler space craft is charting new galaxies and even greater stars as it sails into outer space.

And where is Faith in all of this. Exactly where it should be. We have Faith in things that are not seen. Faith is what our ancestors had when they left the civilized world to come to the new world. And faith is what slaves had when they found themselves in the holds of ships and sold to plantation owners to work the crops. And faith is what our parents had when they decided to marry and start a family. You and I are proofs of that faith.

And every time we discover a new world, or a new cure for a disease, or a new way to communicate, or even when we discover the bones of a whale in the middle of the Saharan Desert, a whale that had arms and legs and could walk on dry ground. 30 million years ago. Our only response is to say: "Praise God." Our God is great enough to do all that... and much more.

When you and I get in the habit of putting limits on God, we will discover that our faith will have limits as well. The author of Hebrews reminds us that Abraham set no limits on God and therefore he had no limits. By its very nature, Faith is limitless because our God is limitless.

Let the scientists discover everything they can about God's Universe, because everything they discover points us in only one direction. How Great Thou Art.

And that is the essence of Faith. No limits.. because if it has limits it isn't faith. Amen

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