

By Faith

Sterling UMC

August 8, 2010

Psalm 25**Hebrews 11: 1-3, 8-10**

Listen to Hebrews chapter 11, verse one again: “Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see”. One definition of faith is complete trust as seen here in Hebrews with the retelling of Abraham’s faith and being sent out. Granted, it took Abraham a little time to get it right...but isn’t that reassuring? Even those who go on to serve God in great ways can feel uncertain about their direction and need a little extra help. In the end he was reassured by God and of His call for him and his family, and he went, by faith and with trust.

The rest of Hebrews chapter 11 goes through many other examples of people being called by their faith and accomplishing great things for God. I really love how this chapter shows the diversity of God’s calling in our lives. Talking to the other Calling 21 interns this summer has really reminded me of this fact. This year there are seven of us—some just beginning their college experience, others like myself about to graduate or just graduated. One already has been accepted to seminary in the fall—going there not for the ordained ministry track but just because he thought it would be meaningful and he is not sure what he wants to do with his Econ degree, others have begun the candidacy process and have full plans to become pastors. Another is considering international mission full-time after graduation while others like me are still trying to figure out our path: short term mission? Seminary? Working for a non-profit but be heavily involved with a church?...there are so many opportunities out there.

Now having said that, going out by faith does not mean everyone needs to quit their job and take up ordained ministry or become a full time missionary in Africa. Going by faith means so many different things and looks different for each person. Here are just a few examples: it could be going to that mid-week Bible Study or small group you have been considering for the last year or volunteering at that organization you love but just don’t think you have the time. Maybe it is going on a mission trip to serve others or joining a choir and helping provide worship. Committees always love help; maybe you want to

directly support a ministry you love that way. One thing that continually blows me away at Sterling is the amount of ministry and mission you do here. It is truly amazing. Whether it is mission trip week, a food distribution, or a memorial service the entire congregation gets behind it with its prayers, presence, and gifts. Looking for opportunities at SUMC is a great start because as I have quickly come to learn, there is no shortage of things to do here, but there are also even more outside of it.

By now you might be thinking, “Melissa, how am I supposed to know where I’m being called? Where IS God leading me? I haven’t spoken to any angels this past year or seen any burning bushes. Many of the Biblical examples include blatant signs from God with semi-specific instructions...where are mine?”. Well look to Jeremiah 29:13. “When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart.” If you are actively seeking God and his call for you, you will find your answer.

I have come to find that there are two common fears that come with exploring God’s call and going by faith.

The first is the fear of the unknown or things that are new. Often when you discover an area of ministry you are being called to, it doesn’t come with step by step instructions on what will happen next or how to take that tug of a call and work with it. Nor does it come with an informational sheet detailing everything that is involved. This feeling of the unknown or newness can be unsettling or even overwhelming which is why you must rely on God and the support of your friends and family. Karen Barbour explained this idea best to me a few weeks ago when we were talking in her office. She says God calls us sheep for a reason. Sheep are not “beasts of burden” or burden-bearing animals. Their spine cannot hold loads, so that’s why you’ve never seen pictures of a sheep with saddle bags slung over their backs. We, likewise, are not designed to carry the heavy anxieties of our lives but are taught to share them with God, our Shepherd. Ever since high school when academic pressures began to heighten Philippians chapter 4 verses 6 and 7 have been one of my favorite scriptures: “Do not worry about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ

Jesus.” You don’t have to take this fear of the unknown with you...you aren’t meant to. Nothing is left just up to us. This fear of new or the unknown is sometimes a result of another common fear, change.

Not only can going by faith mean stepping into something you might be unfamiliar with, it can also require something to change—your schedule, priorities, how you do certain things...it could affect any number of things. “But God, I’ve never done that before...or I’ve never done it that way before God.” How can you grow and discover new approaches or ministries if you only stick with the assembly-line style of production you are used to?

Recently I have especially come to see how God can change your direction. While I have always been a faithful person, growing up in the United Methodist Church, four years ago I was at the top of my class, wanted to go William and Mary, major in Accounting, and then work my way up to a top tier position in some Corporate America office building. Now, as many of you know, I’m going into my fourth year at the University of Virginia, heavily involved with the Wesley Foundation (the United Methodist’s campus ministry), majoring in Economics, and not sure how I feel about even that. Should I go to seminary? Am I being called to full-time ministry? If so, doing what? How about short-term mission? In nine-what will seem like incredibly short-months I will undergo a huge transition and get out of a routine I have had for four years ... I will graduate college. The thought still gives me chills...but I have slowly been making progress this summer to accept the fact I’m going into my fourth and final year at UVA. And while I currently don’t fully understand what is next in my going by faith ...that’s ok...that is what faith is about, having trust that God will guide you in His time.

Hebrews chapter 11, verse 10: “For he [Abraham] was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.” This verse reminds us of the most important fact—our foundation, architect, and builder needs to be God.

So, where is God calling you? Amen.