

The Eyes of Faith

Part 2 of Sermon Series:

Pillars of Faith

a sermon based on

Hebrews 11:29 — 12:2

&

Luke 12:49-56

and delivered on

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at

Cherry Valley United Methodist Church

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As we continue this sermon series *Pillars of Faith*, you may have notice that the sermon title is *Eyes of Faith*. In that vein, I'd like to share a couple of stories – totally unrelated to the passages we just heard or Scripture at all, except that I think we can make that leap.

Does anyone know who Guston Borglum is? He's a sculptor. His most famous sculpture is probably Mount Rushmore; but he did smaller works too. In fact, the bust of Abraham Lincoln that sits in the national Capitol is one of his works. While he was working on it - when the image of Lincoln was just starting to become apparent – a young girl visiting his studio along with her parents, looked at the face beginning to emerge from the block of marble and asked, "Is that Abraham Lincoln?"

"Yes," he replied.

Then she asked the profound question, "Well, how in the world did you know that he was in that block of stone?"¹

Do you start to see where we're going?

I mentioned that Borglum was the sculptor behind Mount Rushmore. Have any of you seen it up close and in person? Awesome isn't it? I first saw it when I was nine or ten on one of those family vacations in that ugly green Pontiac station wagon. Susan didn't get that opportunity. So a few years ago (after several other failed attempts) we went to South Dakota so that I could share that experience with her. But did you know that there's another big sculpture being carved into the mountains of the Black Hills not far from Mount Rushmore, the Crazy Horse Memorial? I didn't get to see that as a kid. There really wasn't much to see then, Crazy Horse's head wasn't even completed until 1998 when I was 31-years old. It's still not done.

There are smaller versions of the sculpture in the museum to look at so that you know how it will look when it's finished. But that's a long way off. Ironically, the sculptor, Korczak Ziolkowski (who'd worked on Mount Rushmore – although with a name like Ziolkowski – his name is at the end of the list of workers) died in 1982. That was sixteen years before the head was completed. This sculpture that he began in 1948 remains unfinished. Although, I don't know if the word remains is correct, because the work goes on. His wife and his children have continued the work.

In that passage from Hebrews we hear about those men and women of faith who endured: Rahabe, Gideon, Barack, Samson, Jephthah, David and Samuel, and the multitude of others who were commended for their faith. "Yet all these, though they were commended for their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better so that they would not, apart from us, be made perfect," (Heb. 11:39-40) as it says in that passage.

That's one of the difficult things about faith. Sometimes the biggest promise lies outside our own lifetime. How many people waited and died waiting for the Messiah before Jesus was born? Does that mean God wasn't faithful in his promise? He fulfilled it. So, no. Simeon was blessed to see the child Jesus when he was brought to the temple for dedication having been faithful to the promise and prayed such that we have been blessed with the prayer said or sung during evening prayer – the *Nunc Dimittis*. (Lk. 2:25-35) There are other stories like that.

Now, as the apostle says in 2 Peter 3:13, "But, in accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home." But it gets hard two thousand years out. Doesn't it? When will the kingdom of God be fulfilled? We want to see the promise in Revelation, "a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more." (Rev. 21:1) With the prophets, Isaiah and Micah, we long for that day when swords shall be beaten into plowshares, and nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more." (Isa. 2:4 & Micah 4:3) But it seems as if the world is becoming more cantankerous.

¹ Michael Hodgin, *1002 Humorous Illustrations for Public Speaking* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 2004) 379-380.

Martin Luther King, Jr. had a dream, that his “four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.” It seemed like we were making progress in that regard when Barack Obama – a black man – was elected president of the United States in 2016. Whether you supported his candidacy or his policies – this was a significant change in a nation that still had laws prevented people of color from voting when I was born.

Now it seems that the opposite is happening. Distrust of other – tribalism – is flourishing and even being encouraged by leaders and the media. Fear is a great tool of the powerful. Politicians and the media use it to get our attention. But fear short-circuit’s our capacity for rational thought. Fear causes us to react to a moment, to lash out or to withdraw. Fear is the enemy of faith.

We have a promise in Scripture that there will be a new heaven and a new earth. Although there is imagery in John’s vision the holy city comes down from heaven (Rev. 21:2), we don’t know exactly how that will be manifest. Just like those who waited for a Messiah were confused by Jesus – the one who rode that donkey in a humble victory parade not to conquer or vanquish people, but so that by offering himself, the power of death itself might be conquered – vanquished – by his death on a cross leading to that empty tomb.

Faith in that promise should lead us to stand firm in our work toward claiming the kingdom of heaven on earth even now! Because we live in a democratic republic, we can use government as a tool toward claiming that promise. But in the meantime, we need to remember that the promise is ours to claim.

That Crazy Horse Memorial remains unfinished – or a work in progress. That progress is slow. It would go faster with more money. There were opportunities at different times to receive government funding; but then the government would get to decide what the vision for the memorial is. The family rejected those resources because they wanted to remain true to the vision.

Don’t take what I’ve said as anti-government. As I said, we can use government as a tool. But the victory won’t come through the success of The United States or any other government – the victory – the new heaven and new earth comes through Jesus Christ so that we can claim God’s promise.

We have work to do. I believe that part of what we’re seeing now is fear – not just human fear – but Satan’s fear and fear within that company of demons – each time the world moves closer toward that new earth promised – that fear strikes back and tries to dissuade us from faithful thinking.

Do you remember what I said, last week, was the difference between faith and wishful thinking? Or hoping and wishing? Wishing wants it to happen for us. Hope – faith – anticipates that we have a promise that we can trust so that we can claim it. That’s why I’m suspicious of some of these end times preachers proclaiming that Jesus will come back and fix everything. I don’t know about you, but I’d like my house to be in order if Jesus came knocking on the door.

1 Corinthians 12:27 says, “Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.” What are we waiting for? We might not get to see the final fulfillment of the promise from this side of the Jordan, but the promise will be fulfilled.

An eye of faith should compel us to work toward that end. That means standing against bigotry and racism. It means – regardless of your stance on immigration numbers – that we speak out against those who would demean those people who’ve heard us brag about what a great country we have and who want to be a part of it themselves. Really? Does that make sense?

“The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.” That’s from the Bible, Leviticus 19:34. Do we just dismiss the parts that we don’t like?

That’s just the tip of the iceberg. For “there is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; (if we) are one in Christ Jesus.” (Gal. 3:28)

An eye of faith invites us to see that day, even when it’s obscured by rock, and to claim it, trusting that that day will come, even if it seems far off. AMEN