

*I Would Walk 1,000 Miles*

First Congregational Church Branford

Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-12; 1/27/19

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Listen in this *Letter to the Hebrews* for the Meaning of Faith.

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. Indeed, by faith our ancestors received approval. By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible. By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to set out for a place that he was to receive as an inheritance; and he set out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he stayed for a time in the land he had been promised, as in a foreign land, living in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he looked forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. By faith he received power of procreation, even though he was too old—and Sarah herself was barren—because he considered him faithful who had promised. Therefore from one person, and this one as good as dead, descendants were born, “as many as the stars of heaven and as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.”

Abraham and Sarah did a lot a walkin’ to get to the Promised Land! He at 75 years of age, and she at 65! Abraham was born in present day Iraq. When God called Abraham, he obediently walked 700 miles to the borders of Iraq, 700 miles into Syria, another 800 down to Egypt, and then into the land of Canaan, the land of promise, which is now Israel, where he lived the rest of his days.

The Scottish band, The Proclaimers had a hit record in 2011. As I go through the lyrics, imagine Abraham, imagine yourself speaking these words to God:

When I wake up, I’m gonna be the one who wakes up next to you. When I go out, I know I’m gonna be the one who goes along with you. I would walk 500 miles, and I would walk 500 more, Just to be the one who walked 1000 miles to fall down at your door. When I’m working, I know I’m gonna be the one who’s working hard for you, and when the money comes in for the work I’ll do, I’ll pass almost every penny on to you. When I come home, I know I’m gonna be the one who comes back home to you. And if I grow old, I know I’m gonna be the one who’s growing old with you. When I’m lonely, I know I’m gonna be the one whose lonely without you. When I’m dreaming, I know I’m gonna dream, dream

about the time when I'm with you. But I would walk 500 miles, and I would walk 500 more, just to be the one who walked 1,000 miles to fall down at your door.

That's devotion. Isn't that so Abraham? Anybody here have that kind of love? [hand up] Anybody here have that kind of faith? [half hand up] That's a little harder, huh? What if we did, what if we just proclaimed it? *I have faith in my God.* Say it, *I have faith in my God.* You might say, I don't know, some things in my life *look* pretty dicey, I can't *see* the way out - but, the good thing is that we do have the apostle St. Paul who inspires us to *walk by faith, not by sight.*

Now, Abraham's journey was rough - they had to find food and water for both animals and people. They had a decent-sized entourage. They had to defend themselves from bandits along the road and the people through whose land they had to pass. They had to endure harsh weather and nasty sandstorms. At 75 years old! But, Abraham *had made the decision* to walk by faith. And, not look back.

He would walk 1,000 miles. Can you repeat this: I would walk 1,000 miles...

Abraham experienced how hard it is to leave your birthplace, to leave everything you've known, your social group, a familiar environment, just cut ties. At 75 and 65! They have no idea what they're going to. In the Book of Genesis, we know that God had told Abraham, "*I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing; in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.*" So, Abraham surrendered, and said, Make me a blessing, Lord.

With God's hand in one hand, and Sarah's hand in the other, they set off for the city that has foundations, whose *architect and builder is God.* Not Abraham's, but God's. It took great faith to leave the past behind.

I think about you and how it's never easy for a church to set a different course, to take risks. But, as your moderator pointed out in a message this week in the Spire, for almost four centuries FCCB has gathered to think about and pray on what you want the church to look like during the coming years. You met and planned as the church no longer ran the town's government and as the Connecticut colony moved to statehood. You met and planned as slavery was abolished - and as

civil rights movements gained new rights for American citizens, including our members. You met and planned through a revolution, a civil war, two world wars, Vietnam and other conflicts. And yet, in the face of all those challenges, you're still here, as you've found new ways to organize yourselves and to serve the community.

And, I think about how flexible you've had to be over these last 6 years, to just keep walking in faith.

And, I really do think you've come to accept that there are less people in the pews now - there'd been denial about that, and that there's less finances to go around. But, you know how we label that as a bad thing, a failure thing? God may not see it that way! He's like, *maybe I can get them to keep moving, growing, changing, doing something new, and stop fretting over numbers, finances and losses. I want to make them a blessing. I can make them a blessing if they stop looking back!* We don't know what's out there, but God's saying, look - you're going to have to trust me - put your hand in mine.

*Sometimes we have to say goodbye to something in order to say hello to something else God wants for us...*

A member and I were talking about church mission a couple of weeks ago, and I mentioned that we need some kind of fire lit under us. They said, "I think people really wanted to support the church and were more ready to work to save our church a few years ago. But, the church is too tired and been through too much now"....

Yikes! That'll never do! We have to turn this ship around! A mission that the majority of us can sink our teeth into will give us our momentum. That's how we can be a blessing. And, then *that* will be our focus instead of who is or isn't in the pews, and how much money we have or don't.

I would walk 500 miles for this. Would you?...

I often look to older members in my congregations for faith and determination. Because they've seen it all, times 10. They've seen comings and goings of ministers, conflicts and divisions in the church. They understand the seasons of the church, and because they carry this history, they never lose their head over what's happening - watch them, they just don't, 'cause they know the church is going to come out on the other side. These Abrahams and Sarahs say, *guide our feet, Lord. Make us a blessing.*

Will you walk 500 miles?

Not even knowing where we're going?

Why is it that we can do that?

By putting one hand in God's hand and the other hand in our neighbor's hand.

And look forward to a future whose architect and builder is God.

I will walk 500 miles. You will walk 500 miles. The church will walk 1,000 miles just to be the ones who come back home - to You. Amen.

