

Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16

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 and Sarah obeyed when they were called to set out for a place that they were to receive as an inheritance; and they set out, not knowing where they were going. By faith they stayed for a time in the land they had been promised, as in a foreign land, living in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with them of the same promise. For they looked forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. By faith they received power of procreation, even though Abraham was too old—and Sarah herself was barren—because they considered faithful the One who had promised. Therefore from two persons, and these ones as good as dead, descendants were born, 'as many as the stars of heaven and as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.'

All of these died in faith without having received the promises, but from a distance they saw and greeted them. They confessed that they were strangers and foreigners on the earth, for people who speak in this way make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of the land that they had left behind, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; indeed, God has prepared a city for them.

Luke 12:32-34

"Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your God's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Without Map Nor Compass

A recent commentary described the Letter to the Hebrews as "a delight for the person who enjoys puzzles" (Lane, WB, xlvi). The literary form of the book is uncertain. The author and time of writing are unknown. The logic and flow of thought are unusual for most modern people. It must be perfect for post-modern folk! Furthermore, it is a book about being on a faith journey, which makes it an even more perfect fit for First Congregational folk.

This scripture brings to mind an episode I often recall. In the early years of our relationship, Diana and I went to Sequoia Kings Canyon National Park on vacation. It's a gorgeous place up in the high sierras in California, not too far from Yosemite, but with fewer people. As the name implies, it is one of the last remnants of the giant sequoia forests, magnificent trees that seem to touch heaven with their branches. While there we went on a hike to see a cabin an early settler made of a fallen tree. Carved it right into the log. It was a beautiful day for a walk in the forest. After checking out the log cabin, I was ready to head back on the trail that brought us there, but Diana wouldn't hear of it. She wanted to take a different way. She claimed she could see a trail on the farther side of the meadow. As I said, those were the early days of the relationship, so against my better judgement, I went along with it. So we walked and walked on this pseudo trail, which was no more than a deer path, until it practically disappeared. Ever the voice of reason, I suggested we turn right around and go back the way we came. Undaunted by the paucity of evidence, she claimed we were almost there. "How do you know?", I asked. "Instinct", she replied. That's when I snapped. "Instinct? Instinct? I'm lost in the forest and you want me to trust instinct? I want a map and a compass!" Well, to make a long story short, she was right on the money and the place where we'd left the car was less than a hundred yards away. Since then, this story has become a central metaphor in

our lives and spiritual journeys.

Let's face it, I'm a planner. I love to spend months researching places to go on vacation. Right now I have three trips in the making. Ask me about Ecuador and I can tell you stuff to make you think I've been there many times. I'm merely hoping to go next year. When I was called to my present ministry, I researched apartments on the internet. By the time I came to Washington I knew where I wanted to live. We still live there. That's why I love Meg and Lucille and all the good folk on the building task force. They give us reams of facts and figures. I am thrilled about the way this congregation has approached the move, the contract with the builder, the re-building process, with such great care and planning. I can't even think of how many hearings and congregational meetings we've had. John and Barbara, bless their hearts, led the exodus, like Miriam and Moses. They made sure we were out of 10th and G and settled in our temporary home before they retired. Now we face some uncertainties. With the housing market down, should we go to office space? Again, the task force provides us with reams of information. Every decision we make, we do so with as much information and discussion as possible. Just the way adult, responsible people should. Excellent.

But life isn't always that way, is it? We don't always have all the facts, we can't sort the myriad possibilities, we lack the knowledge to figure it all out. We can't predict the stock market, no matter what Merrill Lynch says; we can't control how our children will turn out, no matter how earnestly we undertake our parental roles; we can't determine the outlook of an election, no matter how hard we campaign; we can't choose the number of our days, no matter how low our cholesterol is, nor how hard we work out. The human situation is full of uncertainty. No wonder we suffer from such angst, such anxiety.

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On the day of my ordination, Bernice Powell Jackson and I had a conversation about my ministry. She was preaching at the service and we were just talking about where this new stage of my life would take me. She said to me: “when the right call comes along you’ll know it”. She was right. It never fails. When we’re facing a crossroad on lives’ journey, all the fretting, the worrying, the sleepless nights don’t help much. Be still and know that God is God. It may be infuriating at times, but let’s face it, we are not in control. We do not chart our futures. Be still, listen.

Both the epistle and the gospel this morning speak of another life, a different reality than what we inhabit. We can take it to mean a life after death, which we all hope and pray for. But frankly, I don’t want to be so heavenly minded as to be of no earthly good. I don’t think Jesus would want us to spend our lives thinking, praying and waiting for his second coming while children go hungry right here, right now. I suggest we can have it both ways. In the Christian tradition there is a concept sometimes referred to as “the already here but not yet”, though of course there are far stranger names for it, like anamnesis and prolepsis. What this means is that when we celebrate the eucharist, or holy communion, we remember Jesus last supper not as an event from a distant past. But rather we proclaim that Christ is fully present among us. Similarly, we anticipate Christ’s return to us, not as a future event but as a present reality. This is not make believe or pretend. This is our Christian faith. Of what possible good would it be for Christ to dwell up there somewhere in another galaxy? Who needs a distant God?

I submit to you that what the scriptures say to us is not that we are to live as future dwellers of heaven, waiting for the rapture; but rather that we must live as present citizens of the reign of God. We already live in the City of God. And I don’t mean Washington DC. (In the city of God there are no disenfranchised residents.)

For where our treasure is, there will our hearts also be. This has to be Jesus' most on target remark. What we strive for, sacrifice for, dedicate our time, resources and effort for, speak loudly about what we value.

"Psychoanalyst Carl Jung(Jung, not Jong) coined the term *synchronicity* to describe what he called the "acausal connecting principle" that links mind and matter. He said this underlying connectedness manifests itself through meaningful coincidences that cannot be explained by cause and effect. (Like thinking about a person and having the phone ring with that person on the line) Such synchronicities occur, he theorized, when a strong need arises in the psyche of an individual."

I'm rather fond of Dr. Jung and this topic of synchronicity intrigues me. I think this phenomenon may be a matter of focus; of selective perception. I am a dedicated birder. I see birds everywhere. I sometimes point a bird out to someone and they cannot see it no matter how hard they try. It goes like this:

Wow, look at that hawk! What hawk? The hawk on that tree. What tree? The big tall oak tree right in front of you. OK I see the tree, but I don 't see the hawk. Never mind, it just flew away.

I believe there is a current term, "in-synch" , that may refer to the phenomenon both Jesus and Jung were describing. I always see birds because my bird radar is always on. Some people see car models. Others tune in to sound and pick up a melody the rest of us didn't even know was playing. So the question is, what are we "in-synch" with? What captures our attention? Where is our treasure?

I have a hunch, or maybe more than a hunch because its based on experience, that when I stop obsessing about stuff, when my need to control outcomes has been defeated by the

reality that I can't do so, when I surrender to divine wisdom, answers that had evaded me crystalize. Sort of "when the disciple is ready, the teacher appears", except that the teacher may have been there all along. In order to be "in-synch" we have to let go of the interference.

So, First Congregational, where is our treasure, where is our heart? If our treasure is the Reign of God, the kin-dom of love, justice and peace, we will bear witness, we will be Christ's church, whether at 10th and G, 4th and E, or right in the middle of the national mall. And, by the way, I think we need to grow this church all along. We don't stop evangelizing just because we're bunking with the Lutherans. This is our opportunity to reach out to folk who sleep late on Sunday mornings, or who like to read the paper, or go out for brunch. This is our chance to experiment with different styles of music, to let our musicians have fun. This is also our gift of time to be particularly "in-synch" with the Holy Spirit, each other and our community. We need to be open to the vision of church that unfolds. We have been incredibly attentive to the design of the building. Now it may be time to focus on the Spirit's design of the congregation that will inhabit the sanctuary. May God's blessing be with us through this rich and holy time. Amen.