

Hebrews 11:1

Ninth Sunday after Pentecost (Series C, Proper 14)

Lessons for the Day: Genesis 15:1–6; Hebrews 11:1–16; Luke 12:22–34

A Story of Trust

August 7, 2022

“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”

Dear Friends in Christ, and fellow redeemed:

It had been another long, hard day at the office. Business had not been very good lately, and arguing on the phone with suppliers did not make Tom feel any better. Oh, they all made wonderful promises to him, but Tom had been burned once too often, and he no longer trusted anyone except himself. He would believe the things they said only when the contracts were signed and the merchandise had arrived.

Tom was so engrossed in thought that he did not see the woman who entered the office. “Good evening sir, I see you are working late again”, she said. Tom sat up with a start. “Oh, its only you, Mrs. Gabriel.” Mrs. Gabriel was part of his custodial staff. Tom was very fond of her. She was such a kind-hearted woman, always so bright and cheerful. Tom also knew that she was a faithful Christian woman, for she had invited him to join her at her church for services several times. Of course, he had always been too busy to go. After all, he worked hard all week and had other things to do. Besides, he had long ago given up believing in all that church stuff. He just couldn't be bothered with it. Yet he knew that it did something for Mrs. Gabriel. Ah, yes, lucky Mrs. Gabriel. She never seemed bothered by the cares of life and business that Tom felt weighed so heavily upon him. Her life was so simple compared to his. His wife had left him a few months ago, just when business started to turn sour. She was always complaining about the long hours he put in at work, and how he always seemed to come home in a bad mood. Tom knew that she was right, but what else could he do?

“You look a little tired, sir. Shall I come back later?”, Mrs. Gabriel asked. “No, I'm just on my way home now. I'll get out of your way”, he said. “Thank you sir. Have a good evening, and the Lord be with you.”

The Lord be with you. Somehow those words bothered Tom tonight. He saw the confidence that Mrs. Gabriel had in God, and in many ways he wished that he could have that same faith. But it seemed so naive to believe in God. After all the things that man had learned about the world and about its history, how could anyone still believe in what he considered fairy tales. Besides, on days like today, he doubted very much that there was a God, and he was even more convinced that if God did exist, He sure didn't care what was happening in the world right now. One look at the headlines in the evening paper convinced Him all the more that there was no God. How many mass shootings had their been in the past year? There is the ongoing violence in the war between Russia and Ukraine. The pope's visit to Canada was a reminder of the terrible things done at the residential schools. Look at the greed and corruption all around us. People are starving around the world. Where is this great God that I heard about when I was a kid? Do something, God, and I will believe in you.

When Tom got home, his phone was ringing. There had been an accident back at the office. Mrs. Gabriel had tripped and fallen down a set of stairs. She was in the hospital with severe head injuries. Tom hurried to the hospital. He prided himself on caring about all his employees, and Mrs. Gabriel was somehow special. But as he drove to the hospital, he couldn't help but think to himself, “where was your God in all of this, Mrs. Gabriel? Why didn't He help you when you needed Him?”

Tom wasn't quite ready for the sight that greeted him when he walked into Mrs. Gabriel's room. He knew that she had taken a terrible fall, but he did not realize that she had broken an arm and a leg, as well as her head injuries. And yet when he came in, Mrs. Gabriel managed a smile. Oh, sir, I'm sorry to have to bring you down here. I guess I was being a bit careless. But the Lord still was watching over me. Tom was flabbergasted. “How can you say that? Look at what has happened to you! How can you believe that there is a God if He would let this happen to you?”

“Oh, sir, you misunderstand faith. Faith is not something we have just when it is convenient to believe. Faith is something much more than that. One of my favourite passages in scripture are the words of a man named Job, who lived several thousand years before Jesus was born. Job had suffered a great deal in his life. Disasters robbed him of his wealth, his family and his health. If ever there was a man who had reason to doubt God, it was Job. And yet he said: *“For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another.”* (Job 19:25–27, ESV)

“The only thing that kept Job going was his faith. And yet Job had never seen God, nor did he know the Redeemer, as I know

Jesus Christ through the word of God. Yet he believed in God. And although Job had his moments of weakness, I am sure that he was confident that God was going to see him through all the problems he was facing. And that is how I feel. God has given His own Son to die on the cross and to rise again so that my sins might be forgiven. He has promised that He will be with Me to help, to strengthen and to guard me in my life. He has promised that I will live forever with Him in His glorious kingdom. Maybe we can't see with our eyes God's forgiveness at work in our lives or the greatness of the glory that waits for us in heaven. But by faith, I know that all these promises are true. And I know that it is hard to see how God could be keeping His promises to me when I hurt so much right now, but what I cannot see with my eyes or with my mind, I can see through the faith that is in my heart. The bible says: ***"Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."*** I am so sure and so confident in God that the things that I hope for and the things I cannot see are as real to me as you are. I see that God has a wonderful mansion reserved for me in heaven, and if I should die right now, I would be with the Lord forever. If it is His gracious will to restore my health, I will still have days to live for Him here on earth. And He will be with me, even as He was with me when I fell to preserve my life so that we could have this time to talk together."

Tom could see that Mrs. Gabriel was tired, so he excused himself and went home. But he could not forget the words Mrs. Gabriel had spoken or the light in her eyes as she spoke with such assurance of God's love. Tom wished that He had that same confidence. Maybe it would have made a difference in his marriage. Maybe it would have given him more peace of mind when business started going bad. But Tom remembered that when he did go to church and when he did believe that there was a God, still he never felt the same confidence and trust that Mrs. Gabriel had in her life. After all, how can you believe in something you cannot see or prove that it even exists?

And yet, when Tom went home, he looked for something he had not used in many, many years. Finally he found it - the bible he had been given many years ago in Sunday School. He sat down and started to read. Was it mere coincidence that he opened the bible to the gospel of John and read how Thomas doubted the resurrection and had said: ***"Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe."*** (John 20:25, ESV) He read how Jesus later appeared to Thomas and told him: ***"Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe."*** (John 20:27, ESV) But above all, Tom was struck by the words, ***"Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."*** (John 20:29, ESV)

Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed. That was a good description of Mrs. Gabriel! Suddenly Tom found that he could not stop reading. He read the opening words of Genesis that declare how God created the world and all that was in it. He read about Adam and Eve and the fall into sin. He read about Job. and about the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He read how ***"God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."*** (John 3:16, ESV)

Tom read as if he were hearing these things for the first time, and the more he read, the less these things seemed like fairy tales without any proof. He started to understand that Jesus did not just die on a cross, but that He died for him. Jesus rose for him! He saw his sinfulness, and the grace of God. He saw how people of faith were always willing to risk everything for God and to stake everything on God, and how, like Mrs. Gabriel, they were not disappointed. And even though Tom did not realize it, the Holy Spirit was working in him, creating faith in His heart. ***"Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."*** the Scriptures said. Tom was beginning to know that wonderful assurance, that firm confidence that would trust in God alone. He still had a long way to go, but wouldn't Mrs. Gabriel be pleased when she got out of the hospital and they could worship together and enrich their faith in this wonderful God. At last, Tom felt at peace, and he was ready to rest. And as he laid down to sleep that night he did something else he had not done for a long time. He prayed. It was a very simple prayer, but a prayer that came from a believing heart. "Lord, I believe, help me in my unbelief." Amen.