

By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. By his faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that comes by faith. (Hebrews 11:7)

What will you do by Faith?

What will you do by faith? Today is our annual youth confirmation. But today, we are not celebrating the end of two years of instruction. This isn't a graduation. What we're celebrating is another step in a journey that these young people began on the day they came to faith. That journey will not end until they reach heaven. We've spent the last two years studying because, God-willing, they still have years of life to practice their faith. They may spend decades facing the struggles and temptations that every Christian has to face. What we've tried to do during these past two years is strengthen their faith for that struggle and give them the tools to continue to feed their faith so that it grows, so that it will be there for them in all that life is going to throw at them. Their faith will make their lives different. So, my young friends, as we gather here this morning, with all of your friends and family looking on, I want to ask you to look beyond this morning, beyond whatever celebrations you have planned for today. I want you to think about the life of faith which lies before you. The faith God gave you will make your life different than it would've been. My friends, **what will you do by faith?**

I.

To guide us in thinking about that question, we want to consider one verse from the book of Hebrews. Hebrews chapter 11 tells us about all kinds of things that Old Testament heroes did by faith. The hero we want to focus on is Noah. **What will you do by faith? By faith Noah saved his family.**

You all know the story of Noah. The world had become full of violence and evil and God declared that he would not contend with man forever. He gave the human race 120 years to repent and then he would bring his judgment. Out of all the people on earth, only one family still trusted in the true God. So as that 120 years began, God commanded Noah to build an ark – a wooden ship – large enough to hold at least two of every living creature on earth. Noah obeyed the Lord. When the time was done, God brought the animals to him and they entered the ark. Noah and his family went inside and God shut the door behind them. Then God sent forty days and forty nights of rain. God caused the floodgates of the great deep to burst forth and water covered the earth for a full year. But God remembered Noah and the promises he had made to him. In the course of time, the waters receded and Noah and his family and the animals in the ark at last came out and reclaimed the earth.

The book of Hebrews says, **“By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family.”** At the moment God gave Noah the message that the flood was coming, Noah had to accept it on faith because it wouldn't happen for more than a hundred years. Many Bible scholars speculate that Noah lived nowhere near an ocean. It may have been difficult for him even to imagine that much water. But right at the beginning of this chapter, God said, **“Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.”** Noah could not see the flood that was coming in 120 years. But God told him that it was coming and for decade after decade, Noah trusted that promise.

So, year after year, he worked on that ark. When it was finished, it stood 45 feet high. It was 450 feet long and 75 feet wide. It was pretty hard to hide. How do you think Noah's neighbors reacted? I'm sure at first, they were curious. But as time went on, it probably became the joke of the neighborhood. If they would've had late night comedy shows back then, the Jay Leno's of that time would've had a field day with crazy Noah and the boat he was building. How many times did Noah overhear his neighbors yucking it up at his expense? But Noah trusted God. Faith is being certain of what God promises even when we can't see it.

Faith then leads us to change the way we live because of those unseen blessings God is giving us. Noah trusted and built. When at last God sent the flood, he and his family were safe in the ark. Whatever jeering Noah had endured, whatever splinters and calluses he and his sons had gotten from doing all that work, whatever money they had spent and whatever they had had to do without to build that boat – on the day the flood waters rose, I'm sure it all seemed worth it. Noah and his family rejoiced that God had given them faith.

God has given us faith. God has given you ten confirmands faith. He's made great and mighty promises to you. God has promised you that your sins are all paid for and forgiven. That's not something we can see right now. Sometimes, the sins we commit have repercussions in this life. Messing around in class and

being lazy about homework might mean that some 8th graders are not as ready for high school as they should be. That might make the next four years a lot harder than they would have to be. Telling lies, losing our temper, gossiping – these things could all cost us friendships and even alienate family members from us. It could take a lot of hard work to earn back the trust of those people. So it might not seem like we are totally forgiven.

Worse than that, in our own hearts we may feel the burden of guilt. We may hate the weakness in our flesh. We may feel that we're such terrible sinners that God wasn't talking to us when he said, "I forgive you." We may even believe that God can't possibly love us. Because our hearts are sinful and sin damages every word we speak and action we do, because it contaminates all our thoughts and feelings, in this world forgiveness is something we have to take on faith. We can't see it.

But God's forgiveness is real. Jesus died and paid for all of your sins. For laziness and self-centeredness, for gossip and lies and anger. Jesus died and paid for the sins that hurt us and our relationships with others. Jesus died and paid for the sins that torment our hearts and make us feel like we're worms that God could never love. There is no sin you have committed, there is no sin you can commit that is greater than Christ's love and sacrifice for you. And when Jesus rose he promised you that all your sin is gone forever. He promised you that God will not count it against you, even if God lets you suffer consequences in this life. Faith is grasping what God has promised. It's knowing that our sins are forgiven even when our own hearts have trouble seeing that and even when there are consequences to our actions here. God has taken all your sin away!

Faith moves you to live a new and different life. God calls you to be a Noah, a person who trusts his promises and who then lives accord to his commands. God didn't command us to build an ark. But he does command us to build a Christian life. And you know what? You can't do that in secret. You may not have a giant ship going up behind your house, but faith truly lived in our lives is just as impossible to miss. And it is a big target for unbelievers. Sadly, every one of you will discover that if you live for Christ, the unbelieving world around you will find that very funny. You will be pressured to stop being so "holier than thou." You will be ridiculed if you don't join in on sin. Your own heart will, at times, tell you that coming to church again is a waste of time. You already know what's going to be said here. Missing once – or twice, or three or five or a dozen times – that's not going to change anything! Wrestling with all that temptation is hard. It hurts.

There is a cost in this life to following Jesus. But it is a cost worth paying. God himself makes us willing to pay that cost. He gives us faith. Then – and only then – he calls us to commit ourselves to living for him. This morning, you confirmands will promise to do that. You will promise to endure all things, even death, rather than fall away from faith in Christ. Are you prepared to keep that promise? The truth is, none of us can do that on our own. The believer that God put in our hearts wants to. He loves God and wants to live for him. He's the reason that you will endure scorn and hardship. He's the reason that you will sacrifice to live for God. But every day, your sinful nature will fight against him. And again and again, you will find that sinful nature winning.

But God will not leave you at the mercy of your sinful nature. He will come to you in the gospel and build you up. The message that Jesus died and paid for all your sin – that will build you up. The memory of your baptism, when God claimed you as his own by water and the Spirit – that will build you up. And the body and blood of Christ, shed to pay for yours sins, in, with and under the bread and wine of communion – that precious gift that you will enjoy for the first time this morning, that, too, will build you up. And God will give that new man inside you the strength to live and confess, to suffer and sacrifice, to remain faithful even to the point of death. And God himself will give you the crown of life.

II.

Noah lived the life we have to live. And sadly, in so many ways, our world seems like a distant echo of his. So many people ridicule the truth today. So many people choose to live in rebellion against God. It's so hard to remain faithful in a faithless world. But God didn't abandon Noah and he won't abandon you either. He has given you faith and he will sustain it. Noah shows us that. **What will you do by faith? By faith Noah was declared righteous.**

The book of Hebrews says, "**By his faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.**" What does it mean that by his faith he condemned the world? Peter tells us that Noah was "a preacher of righteousness." In a godless world, Noah proclaimed the truth. Every board that he nailed to that ark was a testimony against the sin of the world. And you, my young friends, are going

out into the world to testify to it as well. Every time you say no to sin, you will testify against the sin our society loves. Every time you live your faith, you will condemn the world and its sinful attitudes.

But Noah did more than just preach with his life. He preached with his words as well. He made sure that the people around him heard what God had said. He warned them and urged them to repent. Sadly, they did not listen. So his testimony only increased their guilt. That's not what Noah had in mind. But it was the final result.

So Noah was an heir of righteousness. Does that mean that testifying to the truth made Noah righteous? Be very careful here, my friends. Nothing we do makes us righteous. Not even standing up for the truth in a world that doesn't want to hear it. Not even suffering scorn and ridicule for God. If we do those things because we think that will get us to heaven, then we're not trusting in God or worshipping him. We're trusting in ourselves and our efforts. We're worshipping ourselves in God's place.

We can't be God. We're totally sinful. Noah did not become an heir of righteousness by standing up for the truth for all those years. He stood up for the truth because he was an heir of righteousness by faith. God made him a promise: eternal life for Jesus' sake. Even though Noah lived thousands of years before Jesus was born, he trusted in the Savior that would come one day. And God views faith as righteousness. That does not mean that when we make a decision to believe in Jesus we have become righteous people. Once again, that's works. That's trusting ourselves and our decision. Faith is a gift God gives. Faith trusts that Jesus did all this for us. Faith clings to Christ and the promises he makes. And when God puts that trust in our hearts, and through that trust we cling to Jesus, God gives us credit for all that Jesus did.

God has given you, my young friends, and you older and younger members of our congregation, the life and death and resurrection of Jesus. God has placed faith in your hearts. God has made you all righteous in his sight. And through that gift, God has made you his testimony to the world. Be faithful in giving that testimony. Listen now, as these young people confess their faith in Jesus as their Savior. Amen.