

Do not be afraid
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These lessons are talking about the future. Talking about believing that there is not just a future on earth, but in heaven as well. We start with that favorite saying, “Do not be afraid” and end with the same. I think we might want to add, do not be impatient.

In our modern-day world of instant gratification, I am not sure Abraham would have felt his promise had been fulfilled of being the foundation of a new nation, more plentiful than the stars. Moses might have felt less than gratified by just a vision of the promised land. The scriptures are full of actors that followed God’s requirements, and only saw the beginning of the promise achieved.

Faith is a term that is repeated like a heartbeat, over and over. Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. The disciples lived by faith. Throughout the ages that same phrase is the basis for the church. We act, we live, by faith. But not by faith alone.

Everyone of our success stories in the Bible worked, and worked hard. They fought disease, war, poverty, drought, persecution. And today’s news is full of all

of these hardships. We don't have to look very hard to see everyone of these hardships experienced by our neighbors, near and far. And every one of our Scriptural heroes kept their vision committee to the future.

You've heard the old adage, work for today and plan for the future. Wise words. Each day we need to continue working toward our goal of salvation. It feels like so many of today's people don't feel the need to plan for the future, and they feel futility in working for today. That attitude isn't new.

Paul, or whoever was speaking for him in the letter to the Hebrews, was speaking to a people who had given up. They had lost their patience, and were rapidly losing their faith. They were falling into the practices of the secular world more and more, and losing their vision of heaven. Of the promise of Jesus. Of salvation.

We are finding that every day in our modern society. Post Christian. What does that really mean? I am not post Christian. I am current Christian! Christ hasn't given up on us. God hasn't lost interest and moved on to something more novel. It is our task to bring our fellow travelers back to Christ. Back to believing in something more than ourselves. Its easy to start a conversation with a fellow Christian. And they are easier to find than you might think. It even easy to talk

about God to someone who says they don't believe. Or they believe in "something" but Jesus, God, is too big a stretch for their imagination.

Even more interesting is the person who says they don't believe in God because they are mad at Him. I occasionally may point out that it is difficult to be angry at someone who doesn't exist. God isn't like Tinker Bell. He won't disappear if we don't believe.

I was talking to a friend at the Model A Club national meet a few days ago, who immediately shared her faith with me, when I told her I am a priest. She spoke of her spiritual journey, and how her son had returned to Jesus the day before being killed in a car crash. It was her faith that held her together, that gave her enough to carry on. She held his fiancé close to her, and they continued a faith journey that +healed them both.

Dear friends face losing their life long companions, and don't know how they will go on, but those who have faith still find joy and hope in their lives. And that is one of those things we can offer the people we care about that no longer find a reason to believe. We can offer the comfort that faith provides. The comfort that is promised by God in Jesus.

In the losses I have faced in my life, my faith community has offered daily support. God has given me joy back. The perspective of eternity gives me an understanding that loss is very temporary. That our lives aren't leading to a dead end. (Forgive the pun).

And it is up to us to spread the word to those who need to see God's promise. To feel the strength and joy of hope. We don't have to accost someone in the airport with a religious tract. Or stand on a street corner with a sign "the kingdom of God is at hand!" We can just start a conversation about the prayer shawl ministry. Or the drive to provide back packs filled with food for children that are food insecure. Or talk about the ice cream social, or the lamb roast. Or Bible study.

One of my favorite things to do as part of a sermon is to offer a challenge, or give an assignment, for lack of a better term. Here is your assignment for the next few weeks. Invite someone you know to either the ice cream social or the lamb roast. Even if you can't quite make yourself invite them to church.

When we were at a workshop given by the diocese this spring, we watched a movie about inviting someone to church. The family pulled into the driveway arriving at home after Sunday morning services, and the husband walked over to say hi to the neighbor. The neighbor was thinking "I wish he would invite me to go

to his church”. And the church goer, well, he dismissed that idea off the top and was trying to find a way to invite him in for dinner.

It was hilarious as they talked around each other. Both wanted the other to guess what they were thinking. At the end of the conversation, they said with consternation – “you want to invite me to dinner?” “You want me to invite you to church?!”

Listen to the words that Christ offered his companions as he prepared them for their work: “Do not be afraid little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom of heaven.” Let me add, Have faith. Leave your assumptions out of your conversation, and listen. Take a leap of faith and ask, invite your friends and family into the promise.