



Proper 19, Year C – August 8, 2010

Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16

A Homily preached by the Rev'd Tara Livingston

Travelling west along the Trans Canada from Calgary, just past Scott's Hill Lake, where the highway begins to curve to the left, there is always a moment when my heart skips a beat and my breath catches in my throat at the vista that lay before me. The rolling foothills covered in a bright green carpet of grass highlighting the massive grey mountains which, from that particular vantage point, fill all my peripheral vision.

Sweeping and wondrous, vast and rugged, there is no where to escape the view. Some form a perfect upside down "V" like a child's drawing but most are sheer, steep and ragged. Snow caps them even in July and even the clouds move down to greet them.

Magnificent. Glorious. Breathtaking.

From here, from this particular vantage point, everything seems possible and those possibilities are endless.

The highway moves along, descending to the valley floor. As you move closer the mountain ranges become clearer, more defined. The ridges that appeared as dark grey brush strokes now take on depth and contour. The swatches of green begin to take shape as the evergreen trees, ever green and ever growing, become defined and outlined by the sun. Further, further you travel and surprisingly the expansive vista begins to disappear as the mountains close in tight to the road. Now, that the definition of them has revealed itself, in its own beauty to be sure, the skies shrink as the walls of the mountains close you in, beside and before.

The vast horizon of possibilities from moments before has become more distinct.

Here within the embrace of the mountains there is definition and decision.

When you travel on a cloudy day, a day when the greyness falls heavy from the sky the mountains that you know are there are invisible, they are virtually gone from sight. On those days when the sky, pregnant with water, opens up and soaks the earth, it is all that you can do to see the lines on the road that guide your way. On those days it is only the limits that you see, the possibilities a distant memory.

On those days, even the sign posts seem invisible.

From infinite possibilities to a focussed course, from a directed path to a time when all you can do is put one foot in front of the other, there are signposts all around. It is our job to notice more than what's there, to take note of the possibilities of God in every moment.

The thing that is going to get us moving and keep us moving is the vision that God gives us of what we are heading towards and the strength of faith that God gives us to hold on to that vision through thick and thin. The Hebrews reading said that by faith Abraham and Sarah obeyed when they were called to set out for the place that they were to receive as an inheritance. But let me point out a common misconception about what faith is.

Sometimes people get faith confused with certainty. It says that faith is the assurance of things hoped for. It does not say that faith is as clear as day certainty. We get confused between our faith in the vision and our faith in the God who gives the vision. God offers us so many promises if we will respond in discipleship, salvation, resurrection, eternal life, fulfillment, wholeness, reconciliation, etc. But it is God that we need to grow to know, not the details of the promises. It says that Abraham and Sarah set out, not knowing where they were going. They did not travel in the strength of a certainty about what the promised land was like. They travelled because they trusted God and they knew that God was faithful to take care of the details so long as they obeyed.

It drives me crazy when people want to argue about what heaven is like, or about what life after death will be like, or even about what the new creation will be like.

Because most of it doesn't matter. What matters is that we trust God, and follow the signposts God puts before us. You see I don't believe in God because he promises me good things, I believe there will be good things because I trust in God. Therefore a signpost that says "go that way" is enough. If we trust God we will follow it. Abraham and Sarah did not need a sign that said "land of Israel, seated between a river and the sea, bordered by mountains with fertile valleys, 1348 km's that way, see pictures in travel brochure below." God just said "set out" and they trusted God so they set out. Faith is not the certainty about what we will find at the end of the journey, it is the belief in the goodness of God that assures us that the journey will be worthwhile.

People want certainty. I've found as an interesting side effect to being a priest is that people that I meet start conversations by first telling me why they don't go to Church anymore and then they ask me what happens when they die. I'm sure that I am not the only one with this occupational hazard – lawyers get asked legal advice, doctors are plagued with complaints of aches and pains and people make excuses to dentists as to why they don't floss. But I cannot respond to the people who question me with what they are longing for – they want to hear with certainty what heaven is like and why they might want to engage in how to get there. I can only respond that it starts with God, with a relationship with God, and it ends with God. Sometimes that's all we need to know.

Today we are welcoming a new member into the body of Christ. Many people do not understand the point of baptism and some still believe that it is a "magical protection" that they offer their child. But it is so much more meaningful than that. It means that wherever in the world Caelan goes he will be a part of the worldwide community of faithful believers. Those believers are willing to follow where God leads. It means that he is called to serve others, to spread the good news, to provide help to those less fortunate and to love God. It means that he, like all of us, is called to watch for the signposts that God places in front of us signalling us to take a certain path.

It is often said that we must open our hearts to accept Jesus into your heart. But I believe that Christian faith is about opening the door and going out and letting Jesus take you places. I pray that Caelan as he grows into the full stature of Christ allows Jesus to take him out. Being a member of a Church is not the goal or the destination rather it is a place where we begin our journey, willing to step outside of these walls and let Jesus lead us.

I came across a quote recently about the meaning of "Priest" by Harry Williams. He says, **"The true priest, I came to believe, is anybody who is the channel to others of God's love, and is willing to share something of the cost of that love; and whose eyes are open to perceive God's presence everywhere and in everybody."**

In our best moments we are all Priests, called to perceive God all around us so that we don't miss the signposts that are laid before us. In the vastness of the vista with rolling hills and Rocky mountains, God shows all that is possible. In the embrace of the mountains while on the valley floor, God holds us. And when we can only see one step in front of us, God guides us. At all times, it is God who is asking us to "set out" and to let Jesus lead us.

So I say to you now as God said to Abraham "set out". God never promised that the journey would be easy, just that it would be worth it.

And for that, thanks be to God.

Amen.