

1 Sermon, October 13, 2013

Texts: 1 Corinthians 13:1-13, Hebrews 11:1-6

Title: "Faithful"

1. Steadyness - past
2. Availability to God - present
3. Think about the best way to live out the Will of God. Plan for future

Intro: Faithfulness is:

1 Corinthians, chapter 13 is well-known because it is a beautiful scripture reading. It's a beautiful poem, mostly about love – but also about faith and hope.

Over the next three weeks, we're going to reflect on faith, hope and love as the things that make our church what it is.

Today, I'm talking about faithfulness. Faithfulness is pretty straightforward. Faithfulness is consistency in relationships. It means keeping up your relationships with God, with family, with your community – doing your best to make your part of those relationships solid.

There are past, present and future implications to faithfulness.

1. Steadyness; consistency with the past and constancy in the present.

The Hebrews reading gives us an idea of faithfulness as consistency with past tradition.

Hebrews chapter 11 has a whole list of Biblical figures who kept faithful to God's promise to them. Abraham had a promise from God, so he journeyed to the promised land. Moses had a message from God, so he was willing to look foolish and build an ark.

Part of faithfulness is keeping up with the things you have done. I do the laundry at our house for the 28 years of our marriage. If I were suddenly to stop, I would not be faithful.

And so it is in our relationships that we keep consistent with the past in order to honor those we relate to. In your relationships, you know what others expect of you, and – within reason – you try to keep up with their expectations.

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That's one of the great things about a consistent prayer practice. It bears fruit over time. It changes you bit by bit as you discipline yourself to spend time with God each day.

Consistency over time is important. I suppose I should say that there are some habits it would be better to break – but you know that. But there are habits that help us rely on others and they on us.

There's a story, perhaps it actually happened, about a Christian monk in the Egyptian Desert. His abbot commanded him to plant a dry stick in the desert and water it every day, bringing the water from far away. The monk did this every day and the stick sprouted and after years it produced fruit.

When the monk brought the fruit to his abbot, the abbot said, "Behold the fruit of obedience."

There is a woman named Mary Lee who sent me birthday cards for 30 years. I knew her in Baltimore, and she kept up this consistently over those years.

A woman named Helen from my home church did the same, also for about 30 years.

Claudette has sent birthday and other holiday greetings since 2000. That is constancy.

As faithful Christians, we look at the ministry of Jesus, and want to live lives consistent with his. We want to do what he said.

Jesus said: "Follow me." So we want to follow the way of Jesus that Christians have tried to live for 2,000 years.

So, to be faithful, we try to love our neighbor, love our enemy, pray for those who persecute us and turn the other cheek. We do what Jesus said in Matthew 25 – we care for the least, last and lost.

The tradition of the past affects our lives right now.

2. Availability to God.

The present implications of faithfulness are also connected to relationship. If we are faithful to God, we are trying to be available to God.

There's a saying that God doesn't so much need our ability as our availability.

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When we started up the Community Meal two years ago, it was to help those who were lonely or hungry or wanting some kind of connection. But it was also because we were making ourselves available to God, to follow the leading of the Spirit.

Being available doesn't mean we have to go to Africa and start a ministry there the way Paul Webster did. Being available may mean following the leading of the Spirit and giving to help Paul Webster's mission work. Being available may mean that you get a little nudge about someone and you call them on the phone and discover that they really needed someone to talk to. Being available may mean that you take time out of your plans to do something for someone who needs something practical you can help with.

Fifty years ago, we might have said that a husband was faithful if he didn't fool around and brought home a paycheck each pay period. Now, we want the husband to be emotionally available. To listen.

We realize in our family relationships, too, that availability is more important than ability.

Our availability doesn't always means measurable success. Just lately, we haven't had many people come to our Friday Family Film. We don't know the reason. We were faithful in starting it about four years ago, and we had good crowds for quite a while, but now may be time for a change in plans.

Sometimes being faithful means changing our habits and plans.

If we're faithful, we have to be available, even when we don't seem to have the resources we think we need. God does provide. We need to cooperate with God's desires, and the resources will come.

If we trust only in what we see, we're in sorry shape.

3. Thinking about the best way to live out the Will of God. Planning.

Then there are future implications of faithfulness – and these involve planning. If we want to maximize our faithfulness, we need to look ahead. We need to plan how to use the resources God gives us.

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One example was when we planned ahead for our Children and youth ministry and hired Mary Baker. That has borne fruit in many ways.

We also planned ahead when we started our Contemporary Service, which met a real need – a need that we’ve now been trying to meet in our blended service. Our plans changed as the people involved changed. As we went to a blended service, it was in an effort to be faithful.

Another example of faithfulness toward the future was when our church set up our Wills and Gifts procedures. It was over 30 years ago when several leaders set up articles of operation for how we could faithfully maintain funds to enhance our church’s future ministry. They were faithful, and we’ve made very few changes to those articles of operation.

Also, the people who set aside money for the church in their wills were faithful. They knew that the money they had could be used in the future for ministries of music or building or Christian Education or the general church budget. So they designated uses for this money in their wills.

Today’s reading from the book of Hebrews tells us that we don’t necessarily see the fruit of our faith. That may be left to later generations.

Moses saw the promised land, but he never got there, himself.

Jesus gathered disciples, but only after his death and resurrection would the church really become the church.

The fruit of our faith may take a shape we never could have envisioned.

Forty years ago, who would have imagined that we’d be using Christian Education software, which teaches Bible Stories on the computer? And who would have imagined how well this could fit in with art and storytelling and other aspects of Sunday School?

Faithfulness means planning.

If there’s a mission, we need to plan ahead. Soldiers talk about going on a mission. Plans are essential. Companies talk about their mission. Plans are essential.

We talk about the mission of Christ’s Church. Plans are essential.

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Summary – Faithful: consistent with past, available in present and looking forward to the opportunities for faithfulness

Our church and the people in it have been faithful. Sometimes more than others, of course – but then we *are* human.

Our church has tried to maintain a consistency with the past, availability to God's leading in the present, and plan for future ministry.

I pray that God will make us even more faithful.

Amen.