

Hebrews 11: 1-3, 8-16
August 7, 2016
Hamilton Union Presbyterian Church

The writer of the book of Hebrews gives the best definition of faith that has ever been put to words: "Now faith is the assurance of what we hope for, the conviction of what we cannot see." It is a wonderfully profound and simple statement. But lying beneath the surface is an implied question: "What is it that we hope for?" What is it that we so deeply desire that we are willing to live as if we will receive what our hearts so deeply yearn for?

The writer of Hebrews is clear: whatever forms our deepest desire, it is not to be acquired by money, hard work, smart investments, education, being well connected or believing the right things.

The other thing the writer tells us is that God has created within every human soul a deep desire which can only be satisfied...*by God*. We have a God sized hole on our being which only the love and grace of God can fill. As Christians we believe that God sent Jesus into the world to awaken us to that God sized hole and to teach us the way, the truth and the life which will allow us to receive the peace which is meant to abide in the core of our souls.

The sad, indeed tragic fact of our society is that we have departed from the way, the truth and the life of Jesus. We live in a culture that believes this life is all there is.

On Friday night MJ and I watched a film of Agatha Christie's Murder on the Orient Express. Interspersed with the enacting of the plot were frequent scenes of coal being desperately shoveled into the roaring furnace of the engine to keep up the momentum of the train. Isn't that a terrifying but accurate image of our society? All of our energy going to shovel precious personal and material resources to keep a ravenous engine supplied with fuel? The

shoveling cannot stop even for a moment or the pressure in the steam engine will drop and the train will slow down and eventually it will stop.

What drives such a way of life? I can tell you this, it is not faith. In fact by the author of Hebrews' definition it is the exact opposite of faith. It is despair. We might express the inverted definition this way: "Now despair is the assurance of what we dread, the conviction of what cannot see but deeply fear." As we survey the world in general and our own country in particular, which seems more apt, faith or despair?

The problem we face is that none of our fears can be dispelled by making laws. Fear cannot be cast out by fear. Despair cannot be cast out by despair. The only way for a return to wholeness and peace is through faith. And the author of Hebrews tells us without blinking that faith is only effective when connected to our deepest and best desires; and that desire is for the grace and peace which abides in God alone as revealed in Jesus.

The scriptures teach us that Jesus is the way, the truth and the life. God has made it quite simple for us. I chafe sometimes when I see the bumper sticker, "Jesus is the answer." It hasn't helped me pick out tooth paste. But to the truly profound questions of life the bumper sticker is right. *Jesus is the answer!* When I get confused by all the voices shouting around me and all the people who are so sure they know the answers to the world's problems I have a place to go—the presence of Jesus. In the quiet of prayer and reading the scripture I find that deep desire within me. I find the reassurance that the fate of the world is not in the hands of flawed human beings but in the heart of God who created the heavens and the earth in love.

St. Augustine famously wrote that "We are made for God and our souls are restless until they find their rest in him. Friends in Christ, our scriptures teach us to look to Jesus, follow his

path, listen to his teaching, and care for the things and people he cared about without fear or judgment.

It is enough to do this. It is enough to sit at Jesus' feet and then do what our hearts lead us to do in faith—the assurance of what we hope for and the conviction of what we do not see.

Amen.