Earlier this week, as my mom was going through some of her piano music collection, she came across a yearbook of her church’s young adult fellowship back in 1967. 1967 was an important year for her because not only was she chairperson of the fellowship group that she was in, she also got married to my father on that November. On that yearbook there was an article that was written by one of her friends who had just recently emigrated to America. In that article, he was describing his early days of being an immigrant, living in a stranger in a strange land, learning a new language, and a new culture, while facing various forms of discrimination and rejections by others. Keep in mind also that this was 1967!

My mom’s friend described how he worked long hours in a steamy hot-summer day in a Chinatown garment factory. He chose to work in the factory instead of laundromat or restaurant because he could get off on Sundays, so that he could still go to Church and interact with other fellow Christians, just like being back home because he missed that a lot, he wrote.

Story like this was fairly typical among the waves of immigrants who took a giant leap of faith by surrendering and letting go of almost everything that they had back home and landed onto this new country and started from scratch. Many came with nothing but a suitcase, a name and an address, and a few dollars in their pocket. That’s everything that they’ve got. Perhaps some of us also share similar experiences as well, recalling those early years in this new homeland. They were huge struggles and challenges, but they were stuck because they had no means of going back to their homeland. This WAS their new homeland. Their faith began by letting go!

In the text that we just read, taken from the letter of Hebrews, which kind of describes the history of the Hebrew people chronologically, we also got a glimpse of yet another story of an immigrant who left his homeland and ventured out into a land that was promised by God. By faith, Abram set out “***not knowing where he was going***”, or how long this journey was going to take. He simply took off trusting that the LORD will lead him to some destination that was still yet To Be Determined? Nor did he know how long this journey was going to take to get there. Would you take such a trip? I doubt it. It’s kind of like setting the GPS that doesn’t tell you where your final destination may be or how long it’s going to take, but you simply go where it tells you, trusting that it will take you to the exact place where you need to be. Now, that’s faith.

The letter to the Hebrews was written during a time when many early Christians were living in fear - fear of being persecuted because of their faith. Many were raised in their Jewish faith tradition, but they also believed Jesus was the chosen Messiah sent by God. So these Messianic Jews found themselves in a liminal situation, not quite fitting into either categories, very much like the new arriving immigrants who have left their homeland while seeking for a better future in their new promised land. On one hand, they were part of the new culture and new environment, while on the other, they were still very much a part of the old roots or tradition of where they came from.

**To those who were either born in exile or under slavery, their homeland was not so much of where they came from but rather where God has promised them to be and where God ultimately would lead them. This promise was what sustained their hope of their future.** They were motivated by the faith stories of their predecessors that were passed on from generation to generation, of how God’s covenant would prevail in spite of all the trials and challenges. They remembered the stories of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, while contemplating what God may have installed for them in their future.

In the verses that we didn’t read, in Chapter 11 of Hebrews, they highlight a chronological order of many “faith-filled” matriarchs and patriarchs. Although these faith heroes died before they received their inheritance promised to them, but our earthly death leads into the eternal life upon the faith that we entrust into Christ. Our eyes shall be fixed upon what is to come and not on the present or the past. God’s covenant that was established upon God’s people would prevail and transcend upon our children and our children’s children.

Abraham was a man of God who enjoyed his blessings abundantly due to his faith and allegiance. However, the treasures that he was blessed with in this earthly homeland were far beyond what he would receive in the heavenly homeland. As the LORD established His covenant with Abraham that “***I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. 3 I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed****."[[1]](#footnote-1)*

**Abraham lived by faith in order to pursue not only his own dream but God’s dream on God’s people.** As a result of Abraham’s faithfulness, his descendants were filled *“****as many as the stars of heaven and as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore****.”[[2]](#footnote-2)*

Despite his personal wealth that he was blessed with, Abraham did not live in a mansion or up on the mountaintop, but instead, he lived in mobile tents in the wilderness and roamers in the desert, always ready to move, on a moment’s notice whenever the LORD instructed him. I think this alone speaks volume to us, that nothing that we establish here on this earth is permanent. Everything is transient and temporary here on earth.

As we talked about last week that we ought not to fix our eyes on what is seen here on earth, but rather on what is to come in the heavenly kingdom. So we shall NOT focus on tearing down our barn and build a larger one in order to stockpile our earthly treasures, while neglecting to share what God has given to us with others who are in needs. I think that’s the underlying core message here.

Abraham was instructed NOT to settle down in a particular place, NOT to get too comfortable and feeling too complacent with where he was and what he had. But instead, continue to seek the LORD’s best and the next step, while honoring God through his obedience. Everywhere he went, Abraham remembered to build an altar, in order to return his thanksgiving offering by making the sacrifices to God, in recognizing what the LORD had provided for him and his entire household. Abraham had kept his eyes fixed on the heavenly things and not on the earthly things here below. He kept his hearts where his treasures were.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Perhaps this was a metaphor for OUR own journey of faith as well…that we ought to be being transient and adaptable to our own surroundings, whenever and wherever we may be called upon, under the vigilant watch and the leading of the Holy Spirit. We just need to be ready and faithful to God’s calling in us.

In the same way, **our faith also requires us to make the ultimate sacrifice of laying down our lives before Christ.** No longer do we live for ourselves, but we live for Christ. Through our faith in Christ, we are no longer citizens of this earthly homeland, but when we are baptized into Christ, our ultimate citizenship and our spiritual belonging rests in heaven.***[[4]](#footnote-4)***  ***It is in Christ, through Christ and with Christ where we shall find our ultimate homeland “security”.***

As scripture reminds us that ***faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.[[5]](#footnote-5)*** **True faith is not faith that we follow blindly, or a leap into irrationality. But rather faith is filled with great expectation and high hope and the courage to face the uncertainties and the unknowns**. **Faith fills the gap between our human capacity and God’s expectation and hope in us.**

As another theologian puts it, “**Faith can only be fully understood in light of the larger story of God’s promise. Faith helps us to** **see things from God’s perspective and in God’s timing, instead of ours**. *It allows people to see beyond what is right in front of them, their daily problems, to see what God is doing in their midst, to see what God has done throughout the ages, and to see the future joy God has in store for us.[[6]](#footnote-6)*

This is all part of our calling as Christ’s ambassadors, and as God’s agents of hope, peace and reconciliation. Each day, as we place our trust in Christ, we look forward to seeing God’s story being unfolded right before our eyes. May we never feel too complacent and comforted with our earthly homeland, but rather continue to seek God’s desires of us and yearn for God’s eternal promise through Jesus Christ, as we let go of ourselves and place our total faith and trust in our God.

In closing, I would like to call upon us to meditate on the lyrics of our responsive hymn, that is #684 “***Faith Begins By Letting Go****”.* This hymn is one of those hybrid hymns that blends in a contemporary text (written in 1995) with a traditional tune that was written in 1872.

The editorial note at the bottom of the hymnal reminds us that ***faith is not a state of being but a process of becoming****…becoming of what we are called to be, in our relationship to God, [in] other people, and [in] the world*. The movement from one stage of faith to another is suggested by gestures of our hands of **letting go, holding on, reaching out**.

As experienced by Abraham and other faith heroes, God remains steadfast and continues to walk alongside with us, sustains us and carries us on his shoulder. Faith is a life-long journey that requires mutual commitment and mutual nurturing. It is a marathon and never a sprint. It builds endurance and patience so that we may withstand any worldly temptations, trials, and challenges. Although we may at times disappointed God and fallen short of God’s expectations, know that the Holy Spirit will be with us until we cross the finish line at the end. *Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, 2 looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith.[[7]](#footnote-7)*

May the light of Christ shine through us and guide us to the land the God has promised. If you wish, you may follow along the lyrics either on the screen or from the hymnal…#684 “***Faith Begins By Letting Go***”

***Faith begins by Letting Go,  
giving up what had seemed sure,  
taking risks and pressing on,  
though the way feels less secure:  
pilgrimage both right and odd,   
trusting all our life to God.  
  
Faith endures by Holding On,  
keeping memory’s roots alive  
so that hope may bear its fruit;  
promise-fed, our souls will thrive,  
not through merit we possess  
but by God’s great faithfulness.  
  
Faith matures by Reaching Out,   
stretching minds, enlarging hearts,  
sharing struggles, living prayer,  
binding up the broken parts;  
till we find the commonplace  
ripe with witness to God’s grace.***

1. *Genesis 12:2-3* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Hebrews 11:12* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *Luke 12:34* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *Phillippians 3:20* [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *Hebrews 11:1* [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. *Gary, David E., Feasting on the Word, Year C, Volume 3, P.354* [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. *Hebrews 12:1-2* [↑](#footnote-ref-7)