Tradition has it that its roots go back to the Benedictine Abbey founded in 616 AD. The present building is striking enough with its 11th century transept and 12th century nave.

As you stand under the vaulting of Henry the VII’s chapel – you stand where every sovereign has been crowned since William 1st.

Wandering around there are tombs on every side – Kings and Queens, soldiers and sailors, politicians and poets, Chaucer and Milton, Newton and Darwin. There is never time to look at them all. One has to be selective. I’m talking about Westminster Abbey of course.

Hebrews 11 is the Westminster Abbey of the Bible – monument after monument to the heroes of faith.

There won’t be time to examine each this evening but let’s make time to stop and wonder at some of the great examples of faith.

1. The reasonableness of faith.

There is so much nonsense talked about faith. People say “I wish I had your faith” like they might say “I wish I had your complexion” (although not many say that to me if I’m honest!)

Or they say “I’ve lost my faith” – like they might say “I’ve lost my spectacles”

Faith is not a fancy spiritual word for irrational ignorance. As Dr Martin Lloyd Jones put it “Faith is an activity of the mind – reasoning and arguing from God’s revelation

Hebrews 11v1 gives us a biblical definition:- “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”

It’s not an exhaustive definition but it covers two essential ingredients

- The unknown future and
- The unseen present.

We human beings are so insecure that we try and live in the past, survive in the present and trust only what we see. And yet of course, we are intrigued by the future and fascinated by the unseen. So that statistics show that millions of adults in the UK take their horoscope seriously.

Perhaps it’s not surprising that the two areas that science rightly feels uneasy – the future and the unseen – are exactly the areas where faith is confident – in other words – Faith is the assurance that the future we hope for will take place and the present that we can’t see is nonetheless true and real.

Faith is not a blind leap in the dark.
It is rather a rational response to God

It’s saying that it makes sense to trust God and his revelation

Let’s look at three examples

1. Creation – v3

“By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible.”
That’s not unreasonable is it – when you look at the wonders and beauty of our world, of love and life – it’s not unreasonable to conclude that the bible is right when it says that the source of all this is God.

Indeed, I would want to argue that it is irrational to conclude that it all happened by chance. To believe that is rather a desperate attempt to find an alternative hypothesis because the obvious is unacceptable for emotional reasons.

I will never forget talking to Gordon Woo

2. **Sacrifice** – v4 - “By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain’s.”

It was a more acceptable sacrifice because God had shown him what kind of sacrifice he wanted – eg – Micah 6v8 or Romans 12 v1

It’s very reasonable to accept what God says – and yet still so many rely on works to be right with God.

3. **Judgement**
The history of Noah is also a picture of judgement – v7
‘By faith Noah, warned by God about events as yet unseen, respected the warning and built an ark to save his household; by this he condemned the world and became an heir to the righteousness that is in accordance with faith.”

Noah is commended because when God warned him of the coming judgement, he believed it and acted accordingly

It’s easy to imagine the ridicule that Noah must have experienced
“Het Noah – what’s that you’re doing. Building a boat Ha ha. It’s going to rain – floods here in the desert – are you crazy?

But actually it was a reasonable response to the word of God.
So he became the first ever businessman – floating a limited company whilst the world went into liquidation

Well, I can try and make jokes but Jesus warned that his second coming would be like Noah’s flood (Luke 17v26ff)

The world at large doesn’t believe that. “You cannot be serious”
The trouble is that we Christians tend to accept the world’s reaction and live for the present – not taking jesus warning seriously.

It is because of Jesus Christ that the unseen can be seen.
Hebrews has told us that he is the image of the invisible God (1v1) – the guarantor of the future.

He is coming again because he has said so.
There will be a judgement because he has said so.

It is utterly reasonable to believe that.
It is very foolish to ignore it.

2. **The response of faith.**

How does faith respond to God? Again – in three ways -

1. **Obedience** – v8 - “By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to set out for a place that he was to receive as an inheritance; and he set out, not knowing where he was going.”

When the call came, Abraham obeyed. He didn’t demand to have everything explained. He didn’t demand a contract and security with a pension at the end – he left everything because he knew it was God’s call
I’ve had two significant callings to leave – the Bar and London
What is God calling you to now?
The end may well be unclear. Olt’s the next step that counts.
The response of faith is unreserved obedience.
“No” Lord is a contradiction in terms.
It must be “Yes Lord. Yes Yes Yes.”

2. Sacrifice again – v17

“By faith Abraham, when put to the test, offered up Isaac. He who had received the promises was ready to offer up his only son”

True faith must and will be tested.
It’s not enough to say “I believe”.
Sooner or later, faith will lead to sacrifice

Abraham was willing to sacrifice his only Son.
I don’t suppose he ran up the mountain shouting “Hallelujah”
It wasn’t emotion that sustained him but the logic of faith – v19

“He considered the fact that God is able even to raise someone from the dead—and figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.”

God had promised that he would have many descendants and God does not break his promises even if he now asks for sacrifice, God is to be trusted.

Faith does not reason that if God loves us, he must keep us from difficulty, disease, sacrifice and even death.

Rather it argues along with Paul in Romans 8 - “I am persuaded that neither life nor death can separate us from the love of God”

God doesn’t just work with ideal circumstances. The Cross was not an ideal circumstance – the innocent betrayed, tortured son of God strung up naked on wood and nails – and yet through those circumstances, God worked the salvation of the world.

3. Faith attempts the impossible for God – v29

“By faith the people passed through the Red Sea as if it were dry land”

Sooner or later – after the response of obedience and the test of sacrifice – God will call you to do the impossible – unless he be in it.

It’s no great shakes to do something you could have done anyway.

Walking up to the red sea with your enemies chasing you threatening murder – that’s another kind of faith.

Are you facing a red sea at the moment – a seemingly uncrossable barrier.
God bless you. Walk up to it and command it to part.
Joshua likewise did the impossible with God – walking round impregnable walls to the ridicule of those safe inside but God was with him and so by faith – the walls fell – v30

Faith is spelt “RISK”.
What is God calling you to risk for him?

Be encouraged – look at

3. The results of faith
1. **Patience**

Faith is not a magic wand to be waved over difficult circumstances. We live in an instant society and demand immediate results from God but faith grows patience.

Abraham never occupied the land. Instead (v13), he “died in faith without having received the promises, but from a distance saw and greeted them.”

Faith is patient. It trusts God’s timing and one of the results of growing faith is growing patience.

Don’t become impatient with God. God will keep his promises but he doesn’t necessarily say when or how.

2. **Perseverance.**

Faith perseveres. It doesn’t give up

V32 forward has a motley collection of individuals.

Some were mightily successful – conquering kingdoms – v33
Some were remarkably delivered – v34
Some witnessed miracles – v35
But others suffered chains and imprisonment – v36
Some, like Isaiah, were sawn in two – v37

But all kept going to the end.
They persevered through success and failure.

In my study, I keep a framed copy of the poem “If” that I had as a child. It’s a bit “empirish” and not very Christian but it includes one great line

“If you can meet with triumph and disaster and treat those two imposters just the same”

What’s your danger?

Can you cope with success? Will you persevere through failure?

12V1 = “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”

Faith results in perseverance and

3. **Adventure**

Faith results in a life of adventure.

All these folk may not have had it easy but, by golly, they had an adventurous life – no settling down to retirement, looking back with fond regrets – they went for it big time.

Jesus said “I have come that you might have life – life to the full”

As ever, he keeps his promises.

The strange thing about Westminster Abbey is that because I lived so close to it for 50 years, I hardly ever visited it – yet people travel half way round the world at great cost just to visit it.

Hebrews 11 is always close at hand for us and it’s free.
Let’s go there often and read about the life and example of the saints of history.

As we come to Holy Communion tonight in remembrance of the greatest hero of all who lived the ultimate adventure of faith, let’s give thanks for their example and join them in a life of adventure.

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