**FAITH Hebrews 11:1-6 *MM online***

**During these difficult times, we often urge one another to have *faith*. I’ve done it many times in the last seven months in these thoughts although I’ve often commented that we don’t need *much* faith. Jesus said that faith is like a mustard seed (Mt. 17:20) - which was the smallest seed the people were familiar with – and the nature of a seed is, of course, that it will grow. You may remember the prayer of the man whose son was gravely ill, *I believe, help my unbelief (Mk. 9:24)!* And recently I’ve been thinking about the time when the apostles came to Jesus on the mountain in Galilee and we’re told that they worshipped him, though *some doubted (Mt*. *28:17).* I get the impression, therefore, that faith isn’t a commodity, it’s living and organic. But it is vital – we’re told that, *without faith it is impossible to please God (Heb. 11:6)* and that *the righteous shall live by faith (Ro. 1:17, cf. Heb. 10:38).***

**So what is faith? Hebrews tells us: *faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see (11:1).* We’re told elsewhere that we *live by faith and not by sight (2 Cor. 5:7).* You see, in some ways, sight is the enemy of faith – do you remember how Jesus commended Thomas because he had *seen* Him and believed that He was alive? But He went on to say, *blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed (Jn. 20:29).* Hey, that’s us! When Jesus returns, the age of faith will be over because we will have - and *see –* all that we have hoped for (1 Jn. 3:2).**

**Anyway, to help us understand faith, Hebrews 11 goes on to say, *This is what the ancients were commended for (v. 2)* and tells the stories of men and women of faith from the Old Testament. As a story-teller, you can be sure that it’s one of my favourite chapters in the whole Bible!**

**It begins with a mystery: *By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible (v. 3).* Because, of course, we *don’t* and we *can’t* understand how God made everything out of nothing! And don’t mention the Big Bang, because that claims just the opposite – that everything already existed, it’s just that it was all compressed to a single point. No, by *sight,* you’ll never understand creation. But by *faith – In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth (Gen. 1:1) –* it is possible to *understand* as much as our minds *can* understand. As CS Lewis pointed out, “No philosophical theory which I have yet come across is a radical improvement on the words of Genesis, that 'In the beginning God made Heaven and Earth'”. In some ways, this is the hardest verse of all scripture to accept, but, once you have, the rest begins to make sense: for those who *can’t* believe it, I wonder whether any of the rest of the Bible makes sense!**

**These are huge metaphysical and philosophical concepts, so, to help us, Hebrews tells us stories about *people*. We can always grasp the human dimension! *By faith,* it says, *Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was commended as a righteous man, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith he still speaks, even though he is dead./ By faith Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death; he could not be found, because God had taken him away. For before he was taken, he was commended as one who pleased God.* And then comes the verse I alluded to earlier, *And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him (vv. 4-6).***

**Once again, we’re reading some curious things about faith. First of all, see how *personal* it is. All three men mentioned here had faith, but each expressed it in a different way and God related differently to each one of them. Cain had faith in God. How do I know? Well, he made an offering to Him (Gen. 4:3) and spoke to Him (vv. 9, 13-14). But was he seeking Him *earnestly* or was he trying to do what many have done since and dominate his brother by religion? Several of Cain’s words are recorded in Genesis 4, while Abel is silent. Yet, we’re told, *he* is the one who continues to speak by faith even though he is dead! Jesus Himself alluded to Abel’s sufferings in Luke 11:51. What do we learn? Be sincere about God: do what obedient faith dictates and leave the rest to Him. That is your legacy on the earth.**

**Abel had faith and died for it. Enoch had faith and lived – in fact he *never* died! We’re told in Genesis 5 that *Enoch walked with God: then he was no more, because God took him away (v. 24).* Once again, we don’t have Enoch’s *words*, but we’re told that he *walked* with God for 300 years (v. 22)! That’s a *looong* walk and it seems that God said to him, “You’ve come so far, Enoch, it’s not worth going back, come home with Me!”. What do we learn? Enoch pleased God, not by what he *said*, but by what he *did –* his *walk* was consistent with his faith. *He could not be found,* we’re told, which suggests that they looked for him! You see, a life of faith will be noticed – first by God who *spoke well* of what Abel offered and then by others – so much so that, like Enoch, they may even miss us when we’re gone!**

**Actually, Enoch wasn’t *completely* silent. Jude quotes him as a prophet in verses 14 and 15 of his little epistle: *See, the Lord is coming with thousands upon thousands of his holy ones to judge everyone, and to convict all the ungodly of all the ungodly acts they have done in the ungodly way, and of all the harsh words ungodly sinners have spoken against him.* Wow! Enoch’s very hot against ungodliness, isn’t he? Thanks for warning us, Enoch, not to be ungodly. Um, what is “ungodly”? Paul can help us there and he brings it all back to faith – Romans 14:23, *everything that does not come from faith is sin.***

**Remember - *without faith it is impossible to please God*. But faith – just that little mustard seed – changes everything as Hebrews 11 teaches us. And where does faith come from? Well, if God made *everything* out of nothing, that must include faith, mustn’t it? *In the beginning,* when there was just God, there was no faith, but, once mankind lost sight of God as they were driven from the Garden (Gen. 3:23-4), God graciously began to grant faith. As Paul wrote, *it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God (Eph. 2:8).* And, remember, even Cain was marked so that he would come to no harm (Gen. 4:15). Thank God, that He continues to mark sinners with the seal of His Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:13)! Do you believe that? Can you *see* the Spirit? Then that’s faith!**

**Do you know, I had intended to talk about the faith of Noah and Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and Joseph and all the heroes in Hebrews 11, but, guess what? We’re out of time! Shall we carry on again – in faith - later?**

**Meanwhile, in faith, offer what you can like Abel and count the cost – God knows; and, in faith, go for a walk with God like Enoch, and see where He will take you. And, in faith, the God who made everything out of nothing will continue His impossible task of making you perfect (Heb. 11:40)! By faith it can be done!**