

## Walking By Faith

**2 Corinthians 5:7** <sup>7</sup> For we walk by faith, not by sight.

Some of you are probably familiar with the little blue fish named Dory and her mantra, “Just keep swimming.” Dory had a memory problem. She often lost her way and forgot where she was going. When she was confused she would “just keep swimming.”

In our text today Paul reminds us that we walk by faith not by sight. We don’t know what is coming up but we keep following God’s directives knowing that in the end God will lead us to his promises.

One of the members here reminded me this week of how well the account at Jericho illustrates this truth. There the children of Israel were told to walk around the city for seven days. What good was that going to do? How easy it would have been for them to give up on day 3 or 4 or 7. They kept walking and there was no sign of any changes or any results. But they believed the word of God and they kept walking and by faith received the promise.

If they had given up and trusted what seemed like the smarter way of doing it, for example attacking Jericho with the might of our armies, they would have received nothing. But because they literally walked by faith, kept walking around, in the end they received the promise.

Very often God says to us, just keep swimming, just keep waiting, just keep building, just keep walking.

We walk by faith and not by sight.

That is the difference between those who follow Christ and those who do not. Those who walk by faith receive the promise. Those who walk by sight receive only what they themselves can make by their own wits and their own strength and their own hands. We receive what God had made and promised by his almighty strength.

It is so easy to give up when we are not seeing results. Maybe it has been months, or even years, and we think this is not working. We think I cannot trust God’s promises anymore. It could be with regard to our marriage, with regard to our children, or with regard to something else that we want, or need or think we need. It is easy to give up if we do not see the results that we want to see right away.

When we do that we are walking by sight not by faith. When we walk by our sight instead of by faith, the best we can hope for is result of our own strength. When we walk by faith we receive the promise as did the Israelites when they walked around Jericho

One of those promises that God has given to us comes from Psalm 92

**Psalm 92:13-15** <sup>13</sup> Those who are planted in the house of the LORD Shall flourish in the courts of our God. <sup>14</sup> They shall still bear fruit in old age; They shall be fresh and flourishing, <sup>15</sup> To declare that the LORD is upright; *He is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in Him.*

In these verses the Lord speaks of the growth of those who “walk by faith” those who trust God. They grow and they flourish and even specifically, and here is a wondrous thing indeed, “they bear fruit in their old age.”

This is an astounding thing. It is so utterly contrary to our view of life. Our view is the young are strong and fruitful, the old are useless. But God says no that is not so, those who walk by faith trusting God will continue to bear fruit even in old age. They are still valuable to Him and indeed often produce more fruit not less. They still have a purpose. They still belong to God.

The example of Abraham and Lot is a great example here. Lot looked up and saw the land and choose what seemed good to him but later his plans came to nothing, and he ended up living alone in a cave with his two daughters. Abraham let Lot choose what he wanted trusting God to provide and received everything. Abraham walked by faith, trusting God and in his old age was not only still very wealthy but even better received that promise from God the birth of his son Isaac.

The fruit of those who walk by sight dries up when their strength is gone. But the fruit of those who trust in God springs forth more so when their own strength is lacking.

**Isaiah 40:30-31** <sup>30</sup> Even the youths shall faint and be weary, And the young men shall utterly fall, <sup>31</sup> But those who wait on the LORD Shall renew *their* strength;

Psalm 92 points out specifically one of the ways that even old trees bear fruit. “To declare that the Lord is upright.” Those who have spent their lives walking by faith are in a good position to declare all the wonderful works of God. They can witness of all the blessings that God has bestowed upon them in their lives. This is one example which comes from walking by faith.

Another example of walking by faith and not by sight comes from our Gospel reading which speaks of how the church grows. The man scatters the seed and the seed grows “and he himself does not know how.”

Such is the kingdom of God. We share God’s word and God’s word grows the kingdom and we ourselves do not know how. Other than it is the power of God at work through that word.

We had delegates conference Monday and Tuesday this week. Once again we had a paper on that same question which keeps coming up again and again and again: traditional versus contemporary service.

But the problem with that issue is that it is the wrong labels. Contemporary means new, traditional means old. New versus old, is the old way better or the new way? You end up in a debate about organ versus guitar, and 16<sup>th</sup> century music style versus 21<sup>st</sup> century music styles, and this liturgy versus that liturgy. All of these are questions of man-made things. This man-made instrument versus that one. This man-made liturgy versus that one.

But the real question is not contemporary versus traditional but sacramental versus enthusiastic. Are you going to trust God's word and God's sacraments or are you going to decide well those things are not effective we need to do something else?

The term enthusiasm has a theological meaning to it, but even the way that it is commonly used is a good explanation. In this context we can simply say that is a focus on personal emotion rather than God's word. Because those churches have decided that focusing on God's word and sacraments is not effective therefore, they must focus on things that will make people feel enthusiasm. They often get rid of the scripture readings because that is dry and boring. They still have a sermon, but they do not rely on teaching God's word but instead focus on what they think will make the people enthusiastic. They think nothing of the sacraments, considering them as without power, but instead put their trust in the music. Using the music to manipulate people's emotions and make them feel the emotive response that they want.

In short they walk by sight, trusting not God's word but their own methods. These things indeed produce short term results but not the mature fruit of old age which we heard about in Psalm 92.

We can take most of the elements of a so called "contemporary service." I'm not saying it is a good idea, I'm only saying we could do it. Replace the organ with a guitar, a stage instead of an altar, lights and a projector, skinny jeans, and fashion instead of the robe. We could take all the superficial elements and our service would not feel that much different because we would still be focused on the word and the sacraments not the experience. People would come from these enthusiastic churches and say you do not know how to do this right. I would say yes because my focus is on the word not on the experience. These things as Paul says have a "form of godliness" but deny, "its power." 2 Timothy 3:5

These methods seem to produce results, but they are not lasting results. The word of God seems not to be doing anything but will produce fruit that will last even into old age. We walk by faith and not by sight.

At the end of Old Testament reading we hear this verse

**Ezekiel 17:24** I, the LORD, have spoken and have done *it*.

In the context the Lord is speaking about a thing that is in the future, and yet he says not I will do it, but I have done it. Such is the power of God's word that once it is spoken it is accomplished even if we do not yet see the fulfillment. It is trusting this word that we walk, or if we are fish we just keep swimming.

What God has spoken he will accomplish and especially what he speaks about here is the coming of Christ to save us from our sins. We walk by faith knowing forgiveness is our even when we feel guilty. We walk by faith knowing that heaven is ours even when we can not see it. We walk by faith knowing that we are God's children, and he loves us even when we do not feel like it.

Those who walk by sight receive the results of their own labors, but those who walk by faith receive the results of God's promises.

Amen