

²⁹ By faith the people passed through the Red Sea as if it were dry land, but when the Egyptians attempted to do so they were drowned. ³⁰ By faith the walls of Jericho fell after they had been encircled for seven days. ³¹ By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had received the spies in peace. ³² And what more should I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets— ³³ who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, ³⁴ quenched raging fire, escaped the edge of the sword, won strength out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. ³⁵ Women received their dead by resurrection. Others were tortured, refusing to accept release, in order to obtain a better resurrection. ³⁶ Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. ³⁷ They were stoned to death, they were sawn in two, they were killed by the sword; they went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, persecuted, tormented— ³⁸ of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground. ³⁹ Yet all these, though they were commended for their faith, did not receive what was promised, ⁴⁰ since God had provided something better so that they would not, apart from us, be made perfect.

12 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, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God. Hebrews 11:29-12:2 NRSV

Last week I talked about whether we have faith or not using the old milk commercial slogan “Got Faith?” Yet if we left it there centered on the amazing faith of Abraham, we might feel a bit overwhelmed, for when you think about Abraham was one of the most unique individuals in the history of our faith. So maybe we can excuse our selves in the “faith department” because we can’t measure up to Abraham, and other “sterling” examples of faith?

Interestingly enough, the writer of Hebrews answers that question as he continues to list others who had faith. First he mentions the people of Israel who crossed the Red Sea as those who had faith. Well, they may have then, but if you read on, and even before the crossing they were most complaining, scared, rebellious people Moses could ever lead! Yet the writer commends their faith!

Later in the list the writer mentions Rahab the prostitute. No, that is not a “misprint”, that was her occupation before she came in contact with the Israelite spies. Yet she is seen as a “hero” of faith because of her actions to help the Israelites.

While there are some “naturals” on that list like Samuel, and David, others are definitely not. Samson? The man had a life that would make Hugh Hefner blush! He also made some horrible decisions on who he could trust. Yet in the end he died in faith, and is seen as a person of faith. Jephthah? If you read the Book of Judges no question he won a big victory over the enemy in his trust of God, but afterward one wonders where his faith went when he vowed to sacrifice the first thing that came through his door if he had a victory. For the first thing to come through his door happens to be his only young virgin daughter! According to the book of Judges he does sacrifice her !

These are not perfect people by any means! But neither are we perfect people. You and I know we are not perfect people. Yet with that knowledge of our imperfectness it gives us no excuse from holding on to faith, or being people of faith.

Martin Luther said “God our Father has made all things depend on faith so that whoever has faith will have everything, and whoever does not have faith will have nothing”

We are God’s dear children by virtue of our baptism and faith in our lord Jesus Christ.

Let’s not be afraid, or compare ourselves to others, but rather step out in faith to whatever God calls us to do and be in this life.

Pr. John Van Haneghan