

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost – Epistle

Seeing Our Way Home

Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 14)

Analysis by Michael Hoy

1Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. 2Indeed, by faith our ancestors received approval. 3By 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.

8By 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. 9By faith he stayed for a time in the land he had been promised, as in a foreign land, living in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. 10For he looked forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. 11By faith he received power of procreation, even though he was old—and Sarah herself was barren—because he considered him faithful who had promised. 12Therefore from one person, and this one as good as dead, descendants were born, “as many as the stars of heaven and as innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.” 13All of these died in faith without having received the promises, but from a distance they saw and greeted them. They confessed that they were strangers and foreigners on the earth, 14for people who speak in this way make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. 15If they had been thinking of the land that they had left behind, they would have had opportunity to return. 16But as

it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; indeed, he has prepared a city for them.

DIAGNOSIS: Looking to Old Homelands

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) – *Deceived by Visible Things*

The preacher to the Hebrews believes in parallel universes, where God's heavenly home exists side by side with our world—even when there is only visible evidence of the worldly homes. He seems to be saying, “our eyes can deceive us” (v. 3). But try telling that to your spouse, to your family and friends, or to anyone else for that matter. How could we possibly see the invisible? Even if we went back and read the story of Abraham and Sarah, the truth is they were not so easily or faithfully persuaded, as the Hebrews writer would have us believe. No one is going to pull the wool over our eyes. We believe what we see (see v. 1).

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) – *Looking Back, Staying Put*

For most of us, a homeland in sight is better than an invisible one down the road (if it even exists, that is). To be sure, our world has very visible signs of sufferings, abuse, persecution, imprisonment, and subjection to theft (10:32-34). But we could say that things are not always so bad. We could paint the city in a more positive light. Abraham, in his visible homeland of Ur of the Chaldees, no doubt knew that it had its worldly problems. But for all of that, he still may have been tempted to look back at what he had left behind, and desire to stay put rather than moving toward places he could not see.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) – *In Shambles*

When all is said and done, however, we have deceived ourselves into thinking we see and embrace what is really visible. But in truth, we only embrace the reality that inflates our false illusions of greatness, success, stability. Our homes, our cities, our lives are in shambles, because God has not built them. Indeed, God is the one who brings our cities to ruin not only because we turn a blind eye (or two) to the visible things, but because we miss the city that is (v. 16), in all is glory.

PROGNOSIS: A Better Land

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) – *Refounded in Christ*

The truth is, we would never be able to look at things as they are—in all their reality (including the divine reality)—were it not for the city that God designed and built for us in Jesus the Christ. Because he was a stranger and foreigner in our midst—even died on a cross—we have a whole new foundation established for us. We are at home with God through the Christ who visibly, tangibly made his home with us.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) – *Approved by Faith*

We are founded upon that new foundation (Christ) by faith (v. 1). And we “receive approval” from the architect of our souls by that same faith. With his approval, we are encouraged to see reality for what it is. We can view it, in all its starkness, and yet anticipate what God is bringing about in spite of it: Tents give way to cities (vv. 9-10); barrenness to innumerable descendants (v. 12); death to life (v. 13, 16).

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) – *Strangers and Foreigners in the World*

The journey of faith is exilic. This kind of exile, however, means looking toward what is to come. We live, much like our Lord, as strangers and foreigners in the world. Yet we know by

faith that there is a city that is prepared for us. And we are more at home in the world because of that city than without it. Indeed, there is more that remains to be seen. Now try telling that to your spouse, to your family and friends, or to anyone else for that matter.