

“In the Home Stretch”
Hebrews 11:1-10, 39-40; 12:1-3
Unlimited Access Week 8: Hope is a Path
The Rev. Dr. Douglas C. Hoglund

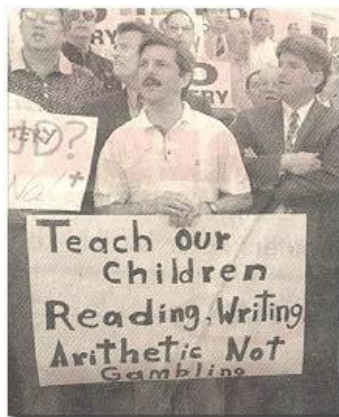
The Woodside Church

June 22, 2025

Here are some scenes and signs you just might see along the road.



Looks like UPS wins!



Better start with spelling



Must have been the Fed Ex Driver



Probably went to the school where they teach ‘arithhetic.’



Make up your mind.



“Brought to you by the School of Arithmetic”

This is the guy I *didn't* hire to put my sermons on the Woodside sign

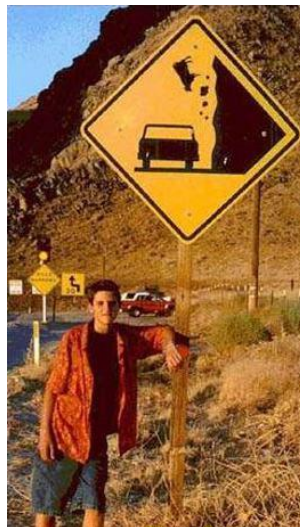




Everything You Need for Your Shotgun Wedding
After the wedding you can stop by this place...



...and pick up a litter of kids
And my favorite one. You've heard of Mad Cow?:



Beware of Kamikaze Cows!

From the moment we leave the hospital, we are on the road. It starts with car seats and strollers. Our first steps eventually lead to trikes, bikes, school buses and a driver's license. Going off to college, commuting to work, endless trips in the SUV, business travel across the not-so-friendly skies – we are a people on the move. And sometimes, the signs along the way are confusing and contradictory.



There are a lot of ways you can turn. And you soon discover that multiple choice is not just on the SATs. Should I play trumpet or go out for soccer? Get a job, go to community college or apply out of state? Get married now or wait for someone else? Is this the time to start a family? Should I hang in at this job or update my resume? Stay here or move to another part of the country? Keep working or retire early?

For each of us there also comes the moment when the choice is taken away from us. You didn't make the team. They didn't accept you to the college of your choice. The career of your dreams turned out to be just a dream. You aren't able to have children. The one you love broke up with you, left you, divorced you. The job became overwhelming, the stress unbearable, the travel unmanageable ... or they simply let you go. And though you *feel* like you are still in your 20s and you can run the distance, your body is telling you a quite different story – it may even be saying you are in the home stretch.

What's the road ahead look like for you? Are there potholes of pain which threaten to swallow you whole? Are you on a detour you did not want to take? Do backups and tie-ups keep you waiting and crawling forward? Are you caught in a circle - forced to face the same problem again and again? Is someone else driving your life and driving you crazy? Are you racing toward a fork in the road and you can't decide which path to take? Even if your ride is smooth and clear, none of us can see what twists and turns, what triumphs and tragedies lie ahead.

You can take all the facts and make what seems to be a reasonable forecast. But we all know how accurate a forecast can be. There comes a time when all the facts don't add up. That's when faith steps in. What is faith? Some say it's blind, others call it a delusion or wishful thinking. None of those are true. Faith doesn't deny the facts, it goes beyond them. Faith is not blind – it sees farther than all our senses. Faith is not a wish and it's more than just thinking. Faith is trusting in someone or something reliable. We cannot live without faith. A marriage can't be close and strong without trust. A business

deal falls apart without trust. When people no longer trust their leaders there is trouble. Everyone has faith. We all put our faith in someone or something.

The real question is: what or who do you put your faith in? Here's where the Bible takes faith to the next level. Hebrews says: "Now faith is being *sure* of what we hope for and *certain* of what we do not see" (Hebrews 11:1). Faith is not a wish, a dream or a delusion. It is sure, certain, solid. It is a conviction, confidence, assurance that what we hope for will come to pass and what we cannot currently see will appear. How is this possible? How can we muster up enough faith to believe what is promised will be delivered and what is invisible will be revealed? We can't by our own power. We are sure and certain only because we place our trust in God, the one who is supremely faithful, reliable and trustworthy.

Now the preacher of Hebrews starts down a long road of travelers. He calls out the names of believers throughout the ages who were sure of what they hoped for and certain of what they did not see.

By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. Hebrews 11:7

By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God. Hebrews 11:8-10

By faith Moses left Egypt, not fearing the king's anger; he persevered because he saw him who is invisible. By faith the people passed through the Red Sea as on dry land. Hebrews 11:27, 29

Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword – destitute, persecuted and mistreated – the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground. Hebrews 11:36-38

Those are some pretty tough roads to travel. Yet they kept on. Why? Because they were sure of what they hoped for and certain of what they did not see. Their trust was in God alone. But after that long roll of call of believers marching down the endless road of faith, the preacher of Hebrews suddenly throws up this stop sign:

These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. Hebrews 11:39

Abraham never possessed the Promised Land. Moses never entered it. Neither did the people who escaped Egypt. Notice that faith is not always *getting* what you hope for and *claiming* what is not seen.

Linda Holm was the wife of Christian musician Dallas Holm. She even sang in his band. But then Linda found a malignant lump in her breast. Though her faith was strong and she was sure of God's care, she crumbled emotionally when she heard the news. She underwent a surgery and six months of chemotherapy. During an interview, her husband Dallas said,

Sometimes in our valley and in our sorrow we believe if we just knew what God was doing, that would settle it. I'm not sure that would make any difference. Faith is when you *don't* know. When it *doesn't* make sense. When you *can't* understand. But you *trust* in God.¹

So why put your trust in God if He didn't deliver what all those Old Testament saints hoped for? Well He did. But not in the way anyone expected. When Jesus walked the roads of the Promised Land multitudes put their faith in Him. Here was the One who would reclaim the Land promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Here is the One who would go head to head with Caesar as Moses did with Pharaoh. Here is the One who will deliver His people from oppression, as the people were set free from Egypt. When He entered Jerusalem riding on the donkey, they all knew the Kingdom of Israel was near. They were sure of what they hoped for and certain of what they were about to see. And then it all went terribly wrong. Within a week, the Messiah was arrested, tried, tortured, crucified and buried. No kingdom, no power, no glory forever.

What they didn't understand is Jesus was in the home stretch. The Cross was the finish line. Jesus finished with sin once and for all. He finished the endless round of sacrifices once and for all. He finished the Devil's claim over us once and for all. The barrier which kept us out of heaven and far from God was finished once and for all. That's what the Old Testament saints hoped for, that's what they wanted to see. Like fans cheering from the stands in a stadium, they watch Jesus, the great marathon runner finish the home stretch. And the crowd goes wild.

So what are we to do? We need to get in the race. All of the believers down through the ages are cheering us on. But unlike them, we have someone to watch, a leader, a pacesetter to fix our eyes on: Jesus. Hebrews says,

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. Hebrews 12:1-3

¹ "Faith and Prayer in Life's Toughest Times," Today's Pentecostal Evangel (7-21-02), pp. 14-16.

On the road of your life is there a burden weighing you down? Throw it off and fix your eyes on Jesus. Is there a sin entangling your steps? Kick it off and fix your eyes on Jesus. Are you in a fog and can't see too far ahead? Take just the next step and fix your eyes on Jesus. He's always just ahead of you, marking out the race for you. No matter how many years you have left on this road of life – you are in the home stretch. If you are following Jesus, if you put your faith in Him, then you are headed home – that's your finish line.

Yesterday would have been my Mother's 90th Birthday. In the 1970s, during the dawn of the running craze, my Mom and Dad joined the Amazing Feet Running Club and became Runners. I remember well, as I turned over and hit the snooze button, they were already out on the road before sunrise. They ran specific distances each day to condition themselves for the grueling 26 miles. While I consumed all sorts of fatty, salty, sugary foods, they carefully ate proper diets for racers. Their bodies were finely tuned and in fit condition. And they told me they actually felt what many call, "The Runner's High." I didn't believe them, but they said it was true.

To this day I am still in awe that they trained for and ran in three marathons – New Orleans, Long Island and New York City. Mom ran those 26.2 grueling miles with grace and style, crossing the finish line with arms held high, wind in her hair and a triumphant smile across her face. Even at the age of 82 my Mom ran in the Thanksgiving Day Race and won first place in her category.

Her life was a marathon. The granddaughter of Armenian immigrants who came to this country to escape the Genocide. When she was only eleven years old she lost her father to cancer. As an adult, my Mom stood by my Dad through all the financial challenges and the ultimate loss of his business. Then, in 2017, my Dad passed away. All along that long marathon she had doubts and questions about where God was and what he was doing in all the dark valleys of her life. But she always kept her faith. She always fixed her eyes on Jesus and put one foot in front of the other.

The road ahead became more difficult. After celebrating her 89th birthday last year she stayed long enough for my brother, sister and I to gather around her bed, share laughs and memories, play show tunes and hymns, and pray. Though she could not remember much near the end, she repeated the words of the 23rd Psalm, the Lord's Prayer and few Armenian words. On Friday, July 19, she crossed the finish line of life.

I believe a great cloud of witnesses cheered and welcomed her home. Two days later, on July 21, Dad, her running partner and dance partner, took her hand and with graceful steps they danced and celebrated their 68th wedding anniversary in heaven. Together again, now and forever.

How did she do it? My Mom's name is Grace. And it was by grace, through faith, that she was saved (Ephesians 2:8) and crossed the finish line.