

Having Eyes of Faith
Hebrews 11:29-12:2
August 14, 2022
Rev. Laurie Crelly, East Church
Grand Rapids MI

Who are your heroes? Who are the people who have impacted your life in some meaningful or inspiring way? One of my heroes is Barry ZeVan the weatherman. Now unless you grew up in Minnesota in the 70s and 80s you may have no clue to who Barry ZeVan the Weatherman was. He was a very popular TV broadcaster that I watched faithfully when I was a child. He helped me fall in love with all things weather related which in turn led to my love of growing food and caring for the environment. If it had not been for other factors and other heroes in my life, I probably would have become a meteorologist instead of a pastor to be honest because of Barry.

That shift in my path from weather forecasting to ministry is because of two other people. Michael Jeremiah my confirmation teacher and Hajo Klosel, the German pastor who gave me my first job in ministry when I was nineteen years old. Both showed me authentic faith and strengthened my trust in God during some difficult years in my life. Mr. J as we called him helped me develop my pastoral heart loving people and a hunger for the mysteries of God. Hajo showed me about the power of prayer and worship to draw people into a life of faith. He made the grace of God, or Das Gnade Gottes as he would say, so real and tangible in his ministry. Hajo died earlier this month and leaves a legacy of fifty years of ministry in Duisburg Germany. I am eternally grateful for the many ways his ministry touched me and thousands of others.

It is interesting to think back and remember the ways different people influence you and teach you and how those lessons stay with you. I encourage you to think for a moment about one person who has impacted your faith. Take a moment and lift a word of gratitude for them. (pause)

In Hebrews 11 we read a list of unique heroes of the faith. I say unique because not all of them are well known. Sure, you see big names like David and Samuel but who is Gideon? He was a scared farmer hiding from the enemy when an angel of the lord appeared and called him a great warrior. It may seem odd to see Rahab the prostitute of Jericho named among the faithful who aided Hebrew spies. Some of those named had complicated lives and were far from perfect and yet they are seen as pillars of faith, people God called because of their faith in God. We look to these imperfect heroes of faith to sharpen our own eyes of faith. Eyes that stay fixed on God rather than the world around us.

Heroes are people we learn from and look up to. We see their lives, flaws, and all, and see something inspiring that shapes our understanding. Such everyday heroes remind us that God can use us just as we are. God not only sees our weakness and shortcomings, but those so-called weaknesses become God's greatest asset in us. Paul in his writing to the Corinthians puts it this way in 1 Corinthians 1:27-29.

“Consider your own call, brothers, and sisters: not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to abolish things that are, so that no one might boast in the presence of God.”

Yes, God loves to use the most unlikely of people to bring about God's will in the world. So how do we develop this ability to see the world with eyes of faith? Remember what we read last week from the beginning of Hebrews chapter 11.

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

First, we must look back in faith to the many ancestors and remember the many ways that God moved in their lives. That's why we remember our heroes, our pillars of the faith that inspire us to greater things. Not just those we find in scripture but even those of our modern times. Our own modern-day prophets that cried out for a better world. They demand true peace. They proclaim the dignity of all of humanity. They remind us of God's call that we be good stewards of this planet and one another. They hold all of us accountable for the many ways we have failed to love one another.

One common thread we see in all of these heroes was their ability to see by faith. See a world as God intended it to be. Through those eyes of faith, they were able to walk by faith as they sought to live into that reality with each passing day.

We too are called to follow in their footsteps. To carry on where they left off on this long-distance journey of repairing and healing the earth. Some would say they had rose colored glasses, but I say they had holy vision glasses able to see the true essence of the world as God created it to be. Once they caught a glimpse of God's Kingdom, they could no longer see the world from a human perspective, but rather from a heavenly perspective. This vision moved them to love and action to work and create God's kingdom here on earth as they saw it in heaven.

So let us take up the call of the writer of Hebrews and lay aside anything that may weigh us down or keep us from running this race of faith set before us. Let us open our eyes and see the signs of God at work around us and join in to create a better world.

Barry ZeVan may have taught me how to read the weather but Mr. J., Hajo and countless other saints have taught me how to read the heavenly realm and prepare for God's work being revealed. Let us look up with eyes of faith and understand the work of God in our world so we can be part of ushering in the Kingdom of God and create a better world here on earth.