

“The Faith to Walk on Air”

A sermon by the Rev. Dr. Jon M. Fancher
Rocky River Presbyterian Church, Rocky River, Ohio
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- Psalm 91 ⁹You have made the LORD your defender, the Most High your protector, ¹⁰and so no disaster will strike you, no violence will come near your home. ¹¹God will put his angels in charge of you to protect you wherever you go. ¹²They will hold you up with their hands to keep you from hurting your feet on the stones.
- Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16 ¹To have faith is to be sure of the things we hope for, to be certain of the things we cannot see.... ³It is by faith that we understand that the universe was created by God's word, so that what can be seen was made out of what cannot be seen.
- Sermon-in-a-sentence: To have faith is to be sure of the things we hope for, to be certain of the things we cannot see.

A few months ago I took a call from a prospective bride who was exploring options for wedding venues. Let's call her "Paula." She had been referred to me by another bride whose wedding I had conducted some years ago. Paula had a list of questions – the typical information that brides and grooms want: *Do we perform weddings for people who aren't members here?* (Yes, if at least one is a baptized Christian.) *What does it cost?* (Our various church wedding fees to cover our costs total about \$700.) *Would you perform a wedding at a site other than the church?* (Yes.) *Do you require anything else besides a marriage license?* (I require couples to participate in premarital counseling, which includes time for us to plan and personalize the actual marriage service.)

Then she said, "I was baptized in the Catholic Church, but my fiancé and I don't participate very much. I suppose it would be okay if our wedding had a religious flavor to it, but I really want the service to be personal... more about the two of us and our love."

As she's saying this, a part of me is thinking, "Why don't you just engage a magistrate or mayor or judge to perform your wedding?"

But she continued, "So what you said about one of our meetings is for planning and personalizing our service... can we make the focus on our love for each other?"

What would you have said? Here's what I told her. "Your marriage license allows you to be married; you can get anyone approved by the State of Ohio to conduct a civil marriage. As a Christian minister, what I perform is a service of Christian marriage. I don't use the service to aggressively try to convince all the guests that they must become Christians, or to be judgmental about people. So yes, we will craft a service that reflects who you are. But the wedding service will recognize that the gifts you've found in one another, and the love from your families and friends who have nurtured you to this point that you're able to make this commitment – everything that has made you who you are today is because of God. Everything we are and everything we have is a gift to us from God." She said that she understood and that that sounded fine. After a few more brief exchanges, she thanked me and said good-bye.

I don't know if she's going to book the wedding with us. Maybe. Maybe not.

Whether that bride or groom choose to acknowledge it – or whether any of us do, for that matter – the foundation of our lives is built upon God. All we know and all we are and all we have is because of God's existence, because of God's initiative. We belong to God.

- We may keep ourselves too busy to take the time to notice.
- We may be too doggone stubborn to admit that we're not self-sufficient.
- We may feel pressured by peers to "pooh-pooh" such childish beliefs.
- Painful life experiences may cloud our view with discouragement and doubt.

But underneath us – holding us up, steadying our way, giving us courage to step out – undergirding us is a foundation of faith. Faith is God's grace-imbued gift to each of us.

The reality is, of course, that that foundation isn't visible. Not to others. Not even to us. At times it can be unsettling, even scary to choose to live trusting that our faith provides a sure foundation.

I imagine you've heard of the attraction in Grand Canyon National Park called "Skywalk." Nearly ten years ago the Hualapai Indian Tribe partnered with a Las Vegas developer to build a U-shaped glass-bottomed bridge that juts seventy feet beyond the rim of the canyon and 2,000 feet above the canyon floor. Perhaps you've seen or even ventured out on it. Someone has described the experience as "beautiful and terrifying at the same time. In your mind, you know the glass will support you and the structure is completely safe."¹ It can "hold the weight of a dozen fully-loaded 747s."² But your eyes are trying to convince your brain otherwise.

Describing such an experience, someone else said the obvious: it takes a lot of courage to venture out. Some people [got] on their hands and knees and crawled.... Others grabbed the side...and shuffled their grasp... as they inched along. Some walked confidently – but fast, preferring to get [around] as soon as possible.³

A glassed-bottomed bridge like the Grand Canyon Skywalk is a visual metaphor describing faith, isn't it? We heard from Hebrews Chapter 11 this morning that "to have faith is to be sure of the things we hope for, to be certain of the things we cannot see."⁴ We're certain that our faith in God through Christ is well-placed, even though in the course of our days we often are stumped by troubling questions and occasionally our confidence in the Lord is undermined by moments of doubt. Questions and doubts may arise because as we look through the sturdy glass foundation that is our faith,

- We see people who seem quite content to carry on without [faith].
- We see a few who argue strenuously that the glass bridge that supports us doesn't exist.

¹ "Walking on Glass," *Homiletics*, July-August 2016, 47

² <http://grandcanyon.com/planning/west-planning/grand-canyon-skywalk-at-grand-canyon-west/>

³ "Walking on Glass," *Homiletics*, July-August 2016, 46-47

⁴ Hebrews 11:1 Good News Translation

- We see that our path of our faith is built upon doctrines and teachings, some of which we have a little trouble embracing, and most of which we simply cannot prove – beliefs like resurrection, eternal life, true forgiveness and unconditional love.
- As we look through the foundation of our faith at the world we live in, we see a culture that doesn't show much respect for lives lived by faith.⁵

But we choose to be people who live by faith in a God who is greater than anything else... we are people who live by faith that God has come among us in the God-person of Jesus... we are people who are "sure of the things we hope for" as we heard in Hebrews Chapter 11. We are sure of the things we hope for.

- The unconditional love we hope for is ours, we are sure, because we trust in God.
- The ability to endure illness or grief or bullying or money troubles or something else... the protection and resilience we hope for is ours because we have faith that God will see us through.
- We are sure that God gives us the ability to stand for justice and compassion because of our faith in God's goodness and God's dependability.

Our life lived by faith in God through the son Jesus Christ is like a glass-bottomed bridge carrying us out over precarious, seemingly dangerous heights. Yes, we see through the glass but nevertheless are confident that we are, indeed, firmly supported by God on this walk we walk daily. "Faith is a way of seeing that what's under our feet, though it appears transparent, is actually the solid rock of Christ."⁶ I think an old-time gospel preacher may have been paraphrasing verses from Psalm 91 when he told his flock that "the will of God will never take you where the grace of God cannot keep you."

...So back to Paula the Prospective Bride. I don't know if I'll have the opportunity to officiate at her wedding. But I hope that she and her fiancé come to realize that the aisle they'll walk down to enter their life of marriage will be supported by an invisible foundation. For all of us, God's faithfulness is a foundation for living that invites us to respond in faith, being sure of the things we hope for, being certain of the things we cannot see.

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⁵ Walking on Glass," *Homiletics*, July-August 2016, 47

⁶ *Ibid.*, 48