



Pastor Jenny Lee, Ph.D.
Upper St. Croix Parish UMC

August 18th, 2019
Hebrew 11:29-12:2

“By Faith, We Are Here”

Do you remember when you became a Christian? How did you become a Christian? Some of you are perhaps, from birth; some of you are from the teenager, twenties, thirties, or much later.

I became a Christian since my age is 25. I was born a Confucian family. I grew up in a rural area in South Korea. My grandparents and parents were farmers. I could not have an opportunity to hear about God until twenties. While I was in a college, I heard about God, but I was not interested to get to know God.

One day, I had a terrible accident. My car rolled over out of the street. My spine was broken. I couldn't walk or sit at that moment. My doctor told me, “There is no hope I could walk again.” I spent time for three years in a hospital. I lost hope, and then, I was depressed.

Meanwhile, I saw a pastor who came to the hospital. He visited a girl who has shared a room with me. When I heard his prayers for the girl, I felt warm whole my body, and my heart was biting in crazy. I asked the pastor to pray for me. The pastor did so. I heard the good news through his prayers that God knows me, loves me, and God will help me. After that, I was strong enough in confidence that the living God is with me, which means I became a Christian. So, I had spine surgery with a hope God will help me to walk again.

However, I could not wake up from anesthesia at that time. You may wonder if we believe in God, everything would be done as we wish, but it is not always. God says through Isaiah, “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts (Isaiah 55:8-9, NRSV)

I was in a coma for about a month unlikely what I expected. My family members and my doctor gave me up. They thought I could have died soon.

However, God's thoughts were not their thoughts. His plan was beyond their thoughts.

I had a strange dream in the coma. I was falling to a deep cliff. I shouted, and shouted, “Please help me, please save me!” and then, I saw the light over the hill. I cried again. “Please save me. If you save me, I will follow you for the rest of my life. Whatever you ask me I will do, wherever

you ask me I will go." And then, suddenly, a big hand came out from the light and caught me out from the dark and deep cliff. And then, I woke up from the coma. After that, I received therapy. Eventually, I walked again.

We all had our stories when we became Christians and how we became Christians as I have. We also see the previous Christians' stories through the scriptures. We see Christians' passionate and dramatic statements through the text. We know Abraham's story, Moses' story, and Israelites' stories;

"By 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." "By faith, Moses was hidden by his parents for three months after his birth;"

"By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called a son of Pharaoh's daughter, he chose to share ill-treatment with the people of God."

"By faith, Israelites passed through the Red Sea." They saw the Red Sea with windy which blown over them, but they passed the Red Sea as if it were dry land. We know many believers throughout Christian history.

By faith, some received the reward in their lives. But others were killed in suffering and persecution without winning the award in their lives. As the text taught us, "they were stoned for death; they were killed by the sword; they went about in skins of sheep and goats." Nevertheless, they still kept their faith in God. They did not believe in the visible things, but they believe in God who is invisible, and who give them the promise for the future.

That is not just their stories, but that is our stories also, and God's story, who is the living God, who loves us so much till gave us his only Son to save us. We are here today with our stories, because, even though we did not see Jesus Christ, we believe in God by faith. By faith, we have hope, which God loves us. He has not abandoned us. By faith, we believe that God works through our churches and each of us.

Let us go back to my story. My hope was toward the future. Even though I couldn't walk at that moment, I believed someday God heals me. If God does so, I believed that I would serve God's ministry in the future. So, by faith, I am here now.

My faith is not because of my perfection, but because God's plan is perfect. Our ancestor's faith is not because of their strength, but it was that God empowered them strong enough to keep their faith in God.

Our faith is based on the perfect and sufficient sacrifice of Jesus. We are imperfect, but our savior Jesus Christ is perfect.

When I came here to this parish, my first impression was that each of the churches has a long and powerful history. I saw some old pictures on the board of Atlas church. I wondered why they still keep those old pictures on the board of the church. And, I saw the red wooden sign at the front of St. Croix Falls church. It shows us how long time ago, this church was built. I wondered what they want to show people through the sign.

Now, I understand that you want to keep those old pictures because you may want to remind your next generation as well as yourselves for your ancestor's passion and enthusiasm toward God's ministry. Perhaps you may wish to develop church remembering their love and enthusiasm for God's ministry. I assume that you might experience suffering and confusion in many transitions.

I saw a sign of Grantsburg a few days ago. It says, "We are under the same management for more than 2000."

When I saw that sign, two kinds of ideas came to my mind; one was that some members are struggling in this transition, and the other was that some of them are trying to hold their faith firmly in God. I wonder whose idea was for the sign. Maybe, it was from the Holy Spirit. Yes, we are under the same management for more than 2000!

Our church is not managed by a female pastor, neither by the conference, but only by God our Lord. Therefore, we believe in God, who works through us. God never abandons us; God is always our side. As God expects us for God's ministry, let us expect how God works through us.

Let us hold hope by faith. God may empower us strong enough to develop our churches through each of us. By faith, we all are here today. By faith, let us step up for God's ministry!

Thanks to be God. Amen