

**Date: Sunday August 8, 2010**

**Scripture: Hebrews 11:1-3; 8-16**

**Title: “The Roads and Rails of Faith”**

**The Message of Scripture (Sermon Thesis): We are blessed to follow a long list of faithful children of God who share their stories of faith with us.**

**The Sharing of the Good News (The Sermon Purpose) No matter our circumstances we can embrace our own journeys as faithful adventures with Christ as our guide.**

**(Remember, it’s all about God!)**

Some of you have asked me about a favorite story concerning my grandmother who recently passed away. I have said that there are so many stories; it would be hard to pick just one. But working on this morning’s sermon, I continued thinking about one memory that was such a great part of spending time with Grandma Hazel.

My brother and I always looked forward to going to the railroad tracks and watching trains. Grandma Hazel would take us to the railroad tracks in the tiny little town of Cromwell, IA. This little town is by our farm and is the same town where our church is located. In fact, many a Sunday we were in church in the morning (That was almost every Sunday) and watching trains in the afternoon. When we did we would sit by the tracks and just watch the trains go by. Sometimes we saw several trains, sometimes we didn’t see any. Sometimes we might get bored sitting by the tracks if there weren’t any trains and we would walk over to this little shed by the tracks that once housed switchmen long ago and we would

peak inside to see if there were any people still there. I'm sure Grandma knew there wouldn't be anybody inside, but it was always suspenseful tip toeing up to that shed wondering if we might see someone. And when we got tired of waiting on the trains or bored with the shed, we would drive to Grandpa and Grandma Cho-Cho's house.

Now that's how train crazy we were. As small boys we called our great grandpa and grandma "cho-cho" because they lived by the railroad tracks and where they lived was just south of where we would sit and watch trains with Grandma Hazel. So this all worked well. If we got bored watching for trains, we would drive over to Grandpa and Grandma Cho-Cho's. Now here's the really good part. Because Grandpa and Grandma Cho-Cho's house was so close to the railroad tracks, if we thought we heard a train, we would pile into the car and take off to catch the train. I can remember many occasions, with rocks flying on the little gravel roads of Cromwell, as Grandma Hazel raced us toward the railroad tracks to see that train. What a terrific way to spend a Sunday afternoon.

Well, thinking about Grandma, the railroad tracks, and Grandpa and Grandma Cho-Cho, and this morning's epistle reading about faith made me think about hobos – that's right, train riding hobos. Stay with me. I think, I hope you'll see what I mean. Hobos would get off trains in Cromwell and walk over to Grandpa and Grandma Cho-Cho's to see if they could get something to eat. These hobo visits happened with great frequency; so much so that Grandpa and Grandma would leave sacks and cans of food on the open air back porch and the hobos could help

themselves. Then in the spirit of sharing good news, something we are called to do in the church, the hobos would leave signs for each other that food could be found at this particular house. What a great act of faith! And in another act of faith and trust, Grandpa and Grandma didn't even lock their doors.

Now people often associate hobos with bums. That's not exactly accurate. A true hobo way of life is marked with a distinct style. Like any group of people I'm sure there were some hobos who were more respectable than others. One time my grandparents left food in old coffee cans and a few days later an empty coffee can reappeared with a scrap of paper that read "thank you." Overall, for the most part, hobos were ones who didn't try to avoid work but went in search of it. They were ones who would take a leap of faith onto a boxcar or ride on the undercarriage of a train to get to a place where work might be found. Hobos were the ones, especially during the hard depression years, believing there were better times and better places ahead (Hobo Website).

Hobos let go of worry and took hold of action. They wouldn't wait to see what was happening, but went to see what was happening. Hobos had a sense of freedom that most people probably only dream of. They embraced adventure. Did you know there is actually a Hobo Hall of Fame? I don't think there's a hall of fame for bums.

And there have been some pretty famous hobos, not while they were hobos necessarily, but their fame may have occurred in part because they had been hobos and had experienced a hobo way of life. People like Art Linkletter, H.L. Hunt, Eric

Sevareid, Carl Sandburg, Jack London and former Supreme Court Chief Justice William O. Douglas were all hobos at one time in their lives.

Yes, most hobos, especially during the depression years, were people of faith and of hope. They lived the words of Hebrews 11 that we read and heard here today; believing in the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. Hobos followed in the footsteps of the people of God mentioned in today's Hebrews passage, which is a grand march of ordinary people; people like you and me. The faithful who march out of Hebrews 11 put on their walking shoes to follow God even when they did not know where they were going. These are people like Abraham, who left the comforts of home to journey to a place that he did not know. There are people like Sarah, who longed to and laughed about birthing a son. Then there is Moses, and the people who followed him, wondering their way through the wilderness to the Promised Land.

Hebrews 11 is a story of God and God's people who dared to believe and who wrestled with unbelief, people who got up and moved with God into a new place, a promised land, and an experience of change and opportunity with hope for a better future (Hebrews). I find that the Biblical giants we read about in Hebrews, and other places in the Bible, lived like hobos and did so for God.

Think about it. Both the people in Hebrews and 20<sup>th</sup> Century hobos would strike out on a journey without being sure of a destination or outcome. They encountered unimagined situations along the way. They met others like themselves and very different from themselves. There had to be times when all these people

did not know where they were going or what they were doing.

Just the same, there are times in our lives when we wonder what we are doing and where we are going. There are times when we take a wrong turn and feel lost and helpless and alone. When this happens we might long for a map, or a Breaktime where we can ask for directions, or find a place where we can be fed. There are days when we grow impatient with our journey and like children ask over and over, “Are we there yet?” And, sometimes, even we, 21<sup>st</sup> century people of God, wrestle with our faith, with our disbelief, as our ancestors did making their way through deserts and we wonder if God does indeed have any future for us.

But the experience of wilderness wondering encountered by so many before us can also be a time of great adventure for people of faith. Wilderness equals opportunity. It can be when we jump on a freight car headed to new destinations leaping away from the solid earth beneath our feet. It is a time when we learn to look to God, a time when we are open and teachable, and when we learn to trust God as we never have before. It is a time when we can look back at our history, and learn from it and see it from a different perspective. It is a time when we can take a look at ourselves and ask the questions about who we are and where we are going. Wilderness is a time when we know as in no other time, that there are others who care about us and who are there for us during the hard parts of the journey. The wilderness is a time of discovery, a time when we look to an unknown future with eyes brimming over with hope and when we see life lived in a new way.

Most important is the realization that a wilderness journey is never made

alone. Just as God led the Israelites through the wilderness with a pillar of fire by night and a pillar of cloud by day, there is one who walks with us. It is the same Christ who was led by the Spirit of God into the wilderness of the Judean hills, and who is now right here with us, beside us. The one who walked his own lonesome valley is our tour guide. His voice of experience whispers in our ears, his light brightens our path, and he will stoop with love to pick us up should we stumble. This is the one who says, “Follow me” even when it is not clear exactly where we are headed (Hearn).

Today’s good news is that no matter our circumstances we can embrace our life journey as a faithful adventure. We can put on our sturdy shoes and make the trek ahead with a vision of belief. We can dare to walk the road of faith and ride the rails of faith like people who have gone before us and when we do, we are making faithful examples to share with all who come after us. When we do this, we join with other people of faith like Biblical heroes and train riding hobos who provide the ingredients for something great – an unshakeable foundation of Faith formed by hearts, hands, love, and even train tracks that give us goodness in our lives. So this day we proclaim our thanks to God for all people of faith who have come before us and have shared gifts of faith. People like, Enoch and Noah, Locomotive Joe and Emmett Kelly, and grandmothers and grandfathers everywhere - including my own Grandma Hazel. Let us pray.

Dear God,

We give thanks for your gift of faith being lived out by those who have been on this earth, by those of us who are, and those yet to be. We all seek to grow in the examples of faith set before us and to be examples of faith for others. We trust in you to help us make it so. This we pray. Amen.

Offering: We give today for unknown issues that will need to be resolved and ministries yet to be named. Giving in this way is an act of faith. The ushers will please . . .

Dedication: Lord, accept and bless these gifts of faith as we offer them and as they are used to serve others in your name. This is how we pray, Amen.

Benediction: Go forth children of God singing a song of the saints of God. We are blessed by the saints and by the mighty love of God. Go forth. Amen and Amen.

Sources:

Hearn, Janice; Lectionary Homiletics; [www.goodpreacher.com](http://www.goodpreacher.com); 2010.

Hobo Website; [www.hobo.com](http://www.hobo.com); 2010.

Holy Bible – New Revised Standard Version; Harper Bibles: San Francisco; 2007.