

Karen Hollis
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Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16
Resonance

I just want to offer a note about the text before I begin. While the letter to the Hebrews is traditionally attributed to Paul, as early as 200 CE Christian readers recognized how different its style is to Paul's letters. This letter reads like an extended sermon from an anonymous author to an unknown community; but we can gather from its content that the community was well versed in Judaism and is struggling to stick with the way of Jesus. Members of the community would be in the church's second generation, experiencing persecution while continuing to wait for God's promised kingdom to arrive. Some may have even begun to abandon the community, hence the sermon . . . let us pray,

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be reflections of your word to us in Christ Jesus.

Um

I was hanging out with some fellow Lions on Thursday while waiting for crowds of people to arrive at the Concert on the Green. At one point I made a comment about the various things in the world that I find over stimulating . . . like turning on the news, for instance. One of my fellow Lions, without skipping a beat, responded, "oh, don't do that! For years now I have been tuning in to see the latest outrage unfold and to see the images of heartbreak with my own eyes. I tune into stories because I feel compelled to know what's going on in the world, because I am concerned about the world and my country; I watch a little bit braced for whatever fresh crisis is being revealed.

On Facebook a couple of weeks ago I saw a political cartoon, showing a bunch of cameras crowded up around a small hate group with a big sign; surrounding them was a sea of people with signs of love, hope and peace. The commentary said . . . turn the cameras around. I hadn't put the pieces together up to that point, but as I looked at the cartoon I wondered if the outrage against hate crimes has put a

spotlight on hate and inadvertently given it more power. Those of us looking on can get spun up and lost in the hate . . . and fear of what hate can do.

When we turn the cameras around the whole picture shifts. We see something that is true, something invisible connecting us all. We see a global community standing together for peace . . . where does that peace come from? We see it again when we turn and see our local community cultivating love (like so many other local communities around the world) . . . what is the source of that love? Is it possible that we are working independently, or are may I be so bold to suggest there is something invisible connecting all of us. We can't see it with our eyes, but we can feel it, we resonate with it.

The anonymous author of Hebrews wisely writes: "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." We cannot see God's word with ordinary eyes, but by faith we know God's word is alive in creation. We know it is because we can feel it moving in us and between us.

This is one of the challenges of our faith, working with something that is so crucial to our lives, and yet impossible to see with ordinary eyes. "**Faith** is the **assurance** of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." Instead of getting caught up in the chaos of the world, the anonymous author invites us to consider that to which we have entrusted our lives. We are assured that what we hope for will come to pass . . . the word for assurance in this sentence comes from a Greek word that means God's "very being." Our assurance comes from God's very being. By God's very nature, God is faithful.

Knowing that it's not easy for all of us to live by faith, the preacher of Hebrews offers examples . . . led by his faith, Abraham willingly dislocates his life and his family and makes himself dependant on God; he leaves his home and lives in tents in a new land that God has promised. Because of that act of faith, Abraham and Sarah are blessed with a child who is the first in a huge branch of God's family.

The source of my faith crystalized when my grandfather died. It was a horrendous time for my family. He was sick for a month with some kind of late stage cancer and my grandmother was ready to

mortgage the house to keep him alive. It was Holy Week and I saw my family constellation as the story of Jesus' crucifixion running as story boards before my eyes. Grandpa was the suffering Jesus, grandma, refusing to turn off the machines, caused him unnecessary suffering, the women in my family looked on from afar. I kept thinking about how Easter will come. This cycle of life and death happens over and over again in the world, and each time there is resurrection. Each story will end with resurrection . . . even if Holy Saturday takes decades or centuries to find completion. Resurrection will come. I thought about it for weeks, even after grandpa passed and I experienced some resurrection . . . it still resonated . . . it still resonates today.

With ordinary eyes, we can see a world of suffering and setback, violence and hardship¹ . . . through eyes of faith, it is possible to see past what is visible, to what is real.² We can see God's love coming through the cracks; we can see the possibilities; we can see the world through hope. "Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, and the conviction of things not seen."

I think the root of what we all hope for is that life will continue. There is a quote on Bennett Wong's memorial in one of the gardens over at the Haven. It says, "Faith is a felt sense of the continuity of life." It's about looking forward.

We can look backward, but Hebrews is right, we desire something better, we desire for the world to heal, for there to be dignity and health for everything living. And so we turn off the chaos (at least turn it down), lean on God's very being (on assurance), and do what we are called to in this life. God's promise takes a long time to realize. We get glimpses of it in a lifetime, and each generation builds on God's work through generations past. I don't know about you, but when I am able to unhook myself from the noise of this world, it's a lot easier to find that resonance with those around me, that resonance whose source is God, and live into God's purpose for me. Nature does that too . . .

¹ Ibid, 114

² Ibid, 114

. . . in 2013 a documentary was released called “Flight of the Butterflies”; it’s about the extraordinary monarch butterfly migration in North America. Monarchs spend summers in southern Canada and northern US, and make their way down to Mexico for the summers in the longest migration on earth. The migration cycle takes a full year, which is much longer than the lifespan of a butterfly, so how do they do it? A lifetime of research discovered that monarchs begin in the north in the summertime, and move south, following the milkweed bloom – the butterflies live for 4-6 weeks and lay eggs on the under side of the milkweed leaves. 2-3 generations of butterflies make their way down through North America. When the conditions are right, the next generation is a super generation, living 8x longer than normal, allowing them to travel all the way down to their wintering spot in Mexico. Nothing is inherently different about the super generation – the characteristics are present in all monarchs, but the qualities emerge when the conditions are right to carry them to Mexico. Each generation has a role, each participates in the whole so the story may continue. And so we live on, participating in the promises of God, enjoying some and working for others . . . all the while living on the faithfulness of God.