

Hebrews 11: 1,3 Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. 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.

James 2: 14 – 17 What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill,” and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.

Let us pray. May the words of my mouth, and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable and pleasing in your sight oh God, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

I grew up in South Africa, a country newly integrating black and white people into the same spaces. I was 11 when my parents enrolled me into what they call a former whites only school. The school told my parents they were full. My mom went ahead and bought me school uniform, and I got dropped off at the school every morning for a few weeks, waiting outside the classrooms with a few other black students, waiting to get accepted. She would tell me every morning as she dropped me off that I would get accepted and reminded me to sing these words from a song: “Lord your goodness and your love will follow me all the days of my life. I’m surrounded with the favor of the Lord always and forever.”

My mother believed I would get admitted into the school. She exercised her belief, her convictions, her faith with coinciding actions against this unjust system.

In many ways today’s texts raised me. This experience I just shared is one I reach to often, it forms a core part of my framing as I navigate this world.

Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction about things not seen. Faith by itself, if it has no works, no actions, is dead.

This text tells us that faith is being sure that what we hope for, which we have not yet seen, will happen, then further that the way this happens is by taking action to create that which we are hoping for, in this way creating a new desired reality.

Today’s text pushes us to truly reflect on the kind of world we would like to create: an anti-racist world. It pushes us to reflect on the actions that are required of us, actions that go against the grain of what our institutions and our histories tell us is possible.

And so today, when we are intent on upending an unjust system, it is important for each of us to interrogate our own beliefs and reflect on how our own beliefs and actions perpetuate this unjust system.

Frantz Fanon says that typically the family represents a piece of the nation, so a child leaving the family environment finds the same laws, principles, and values.... There is no disproportion

between family life and the life of the nation. While for the black child, growing up with a normal family, when they step out of the family environment the laws, principles, values of the nation negate their humanity.

He goes on to say this means that “a host of information and a series of propositions slowly and stealthily work their way into an individual through books, newspapers, school texts, advertisements, movies, radio and shape a community’s vision of the world.”

So according to Fanon our world view is informed by laws, principles, values, all of which make up our nation’s structures.

So, the question becomes what is our world view and what do we want our worldview to be?

What would it look like for us to take on what Rev. Barbra the II mentioned last weekend in the Digital Mass Poor People’s Assembly and Moral March on Washington? He urged us to have an “ambitious agenda” sating “that the worst mistake we can make now, with all the marching, the protesting in the streets, would be to demand too little.” Does not God dream much for us?

We need a moral imagination, a biblically informed, Bible based, God-infused moral re-imagining. We need to engage our imaginations, re-imagine freedom and human dignity...

What if a lot of what we believe and have held to be true just isn’t true? How is it that we live in a world where we have normalized racism, sexism, domestic violence, transphobia, xenophobia, classism.

What if we did believe in a world where there is equal access to quality healthcare for all? A world where prisons are abolished and restorative justice is the norm? A world where there are reparations and there is equity in income, education, land distribution, housing? A world where black, brown and indigenous people’s lives are valued.

How would believing this impact our day-to-day lives? Just as we understand that we are in a climate crisis, I think we need to bring the same urgency and rigor of transformation to racism, understanding that we are in an intersectional “racism” crisis.

So for example, as a congregation, we agree that we are in a climate crisis, and therefore we are altering what we eat, where we buy our food, conscious of the materials we use and how we recycle them, we have conversations about it, we fight for just laws, it is something that is deeply embedded in our day-to-day reality as we understand what is at stake, it is a lifetime commitment, we are convicted that we can live in a better climate and therefore are acting in hope that we will indeed realize a different kind of climate.

So too with racism, we are called upon in this moment to completely re-imagine how we live our lives as anti-racists, how do we drastically change our day-to-day commitments to reflect this, are we truly convicted that black lives matter, are we willing to examine our beliefs, our

convictions about the humanity of black life, do our actions reflect this belief? Can we commit to racial justice for the rest of our lives?

What changes could we begin to gradually see if these beliefs informed our day-to-day actions, inform who we hire, the histories we tell, where we go to report, who and what we stand up for.

bell hooks narrates her own journey of decolonization as one of learning. "Learning the truth about how systems of domination operate... learning to look both inward and outward with a critical eye. Awareness is as central to the process of love as the practice of freedom."

Today's bible passage is asking us to truthfully wrestle with and interrogate our beliefs and our convictions. Our actions are evidence of what we believe. These beliefs in many ways are unconscious, and the more we bring them to consciousness, the more we'll be empowered to recreate a new set of beliefs that enable us to act in ways that create an alternate inclusive, equitable, dignifying reality, that create the kind of world we aspire to live in.

This is hard work, but it is possible work. It is not work we need to do alone, we cannot do it alone, and that's why we have community, to hold us accountable.

Today we were able to imagine and create our first virtual baptism, because we believe in the importance of Skylar being dedicated to God. And too today we promised Skylar that we would create a nurturing and challenging Christian environment for her. Skylar is a new and vital member of our community. And it is upon us to create a world in which Skylar and her generation grow up with a belief system deeply etched in equity, in justice, in an authentic love.

James Cone reminds us that "God's revelation means liberation, an emancipation from the political, economic and social structure of the society."

Jesus is on the side of the oppressed, Jesus has the backs of those whose backs are against the wall, Jesus is the one who subverts structures to bring dignity to those whose lives have been on the margins. Let us walk closely alongside Jesus.

I'm sure you're wondering whatever happened to the end of my childhood school story. After three weeks of waiting outside, we were accepted into the school. My mother's conviction about her child's education, inherent dignity, and worth, led her to live her faith by acting as if what she hoped for would happen.

The most important thing for us is to be clear about what we desire, once that is in place, we are enabled to act in ways that shifts narratives, and births new realities and visions. This is what we're called to do as people of faith, to be certain of what we hope for, convicted of things we have not seen but can imagine, and acting as if it will happen, because my friends, faith without works is dead.

Aluta Continua, the struggle continues, victory is certain!