

SIGHT UNSEEN - BY FAITH  
A SERMON BASED ON HEBREWS 11:1-16  
PREACHED AT CHIPPAWA PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH  
NIAGARA FALLS, ONTARIO  
SUNDAY, JANUARY 5, 2020  
10:00 a.m.

Indiana Jones has become an iconic character.

Movies featuring his character were really fun and popular movies  
back in the 80's.

If you have trouble remembering the films,  
of if you are under 30 and weren't born yet,

Indiana Jones was an archeologist.

His search for ancient artifacts lead him into all sorts of  
swashbuckling adventures.

The movie franchise used the hunt for biblical artifacts in its storytelling.

In the first movie - Indiana Jones sought the Ark of the Covenant.

In the third movie - he was looking for the Holy Grail,  
the cup Jesus used at the last supper.

He never gets to these items easily.

At one point on his quest for the Holy Grail,

after tunnelling through endless caves

he squeezes through a small opening.

to stand on a tiny ledge,

where he is staring into a great abyss,

at a grand canyon of a gorge.

He could be a baby bird

nested in the crevice of the inaccessible rock faces

on the shores of Newfoundland.

It is a 100 ft. drop to rocks below,

it is a 100 ft across to another small hole on the opposite cliff face,

the anticipated resting spot of the Holy Grail.

Indiana reads his grail diary, which contains clues for his search.

“The path of flood. Only in the leap,

will he prove his worth.”

To which he says,

‘impossible, nobody can jump this.’

Then Indiana suddenly realizes,

It's... a leap of faith. Oh, God.

He hears his father's voice in his head.

You must believe boy, you must... believe.

In desperation and with a look that is a combination of fear and terror,

He backs up and makes a mighty effort

leaping from the hole in the side of the cliff.

We see him in midair.

It is clear that he will come no where near to making it across.

His hands claw the air for the opposite wall,

but he is going to fall 100ft to his death.

Then, he doesn't.

As he lands on his hands and knees.

He appears to be held up in thin air,

Indiana takes a look around and figures out what has happened.

Those who hid the Holy Grail,

have painted the pathway across the gorge

to perfectly align with the rocks 100ft below.

It was a perfectly camouflaged bridge.

Indiana Jones couldn't see it.

He took a leap, by faith,

and the bridge was there,

leading him to the Holy Grail.

Part of our experience of God,

is believing God, when he calls us to follow him,

is believing God, when he tells us to love,

to forgive, to give, to share, to pray, and to bless

even our enemies,

is believing that believing and trusting aren't in vain,

even if we aren't sure how it is going to turn out.

We follow, and act, and live, by faith.

Part of our experience of God is following on the path

where Jesus leads,

even when we might not know where it lead,

or how it will turn out.

We walk. By faith. Sight Unseen.

Hebrews 11 recounts the story,  
not of settlement, but of journey.  
Hebrews 11 introduces us to pilgrims,  
who took up a journey,  
unsure what to take with them,  
as they followed a path God showed them.  
They were moved – by faith.

By faith Abraham,  
when called to go to a place  
he would later receive as his inheritance,  
obeyed and went,  
even though he did not know where he was going.

By faith he made his home in the promised land  
like a stranger in a foreign country;  
he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob,  
who were heirs with him of the same promise.

For he was looking forward to the city with foundations,  
whose architect and builder is God.

Hebrews 11 is not a chapter about arriving.

It is about being moved.

By faith.

And so we hear that

By faith Abel.

By faith Enoch.

By faith Noah.

By faith Abraham.

By faith Issac.

By faith Jacob.

By faith Joseph.

By faith Moses' parents.

By faith Moses

By faith the Israelites

By faith, by faith, by faith – they were moved.

Hebrews says,

All these people were still living by faith when they died.

They did not receive the things promised;

they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance.

They admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth.

Not residents, transients.

The writer of Hebrews says,

“People who say such things

show that they had their sight on the horizon,

they were longing for a better country—

a heavenly one.

It is tempting to see the pilgrim, the transient,

the one moving and on the move as disconnected, detached,

maybe even as a wanderer, or as homeless, ungrounded.

But I believe it is the pilgrim,

the one who keeps moving, who keeps walking,

who has the better grasp on our true reality.

For in life and in living, we are on a journey.

We are longing for a better country.

We are looking toward and moving toward

a place being prepared for us.

And so we believe and we walk, and keep walking, by faith,  
even when the thing promised is far out ahead of us.  
Ours is a journey of obedience by faith, with an eye  
on the distant horizon.

And it means we do the things God calls us to do,  
even when we might not see the result,  
or the thing promised, or how it might turn out.

It is one of my favourite examples.

In 1952, Everett Swanson was a missionary who went to South Korea  
in the midst of the Korean war to preach the gospel to the troops.  
However while he was there

he saw many children orphaned by the war.

By faith, in 1953, he started to raise funds to support orphans  
for a few dollars a month.

He worked out of the basement of his home.

He started with 35 orphans.

The organization was named Compassion in 1963.

Everett Swanson passed away in 1965.



He was living by faith when he died.

By faith that sponsoring these children would make a difference.

There are now over 2 million children and their families  
around the world receiving support and care and education.

Everett did not receive the things promised;

he only saw them and welcomed them from a distance,  
admitting that he was a foreigner and stranger on earth,  
journeying, by faith.

We can't be looking just at where we are,

but where God calls us to go and to what God calls us to do.

Even when we can't see how it turns out.

By faith we follow, walk and even run after God.

My childhood friend Peter has done two major pilgrimages.

He has walked the Camino de Santiago

the Way of St. James, nearly 500 miles across most of Spain.

He has also walked the Templar Trail from Paris to Jerusalem.

It is 2620 miles. Or the walk from New York to L.A.

He has done a lot of walking.

Peter said in his blog,

“I’ve tried to make this experience  
more than just a long walk.

Walking along the Way of St. James continues  
even after one has reached the Santiago  
walking continues after reaching even Jerusalem.

One of the few things of which I am certain  
is that the Way will only unfold before me  
to the extent that I am walking forward.

Pilgrimage is not something which one does once,  
adds to the list of tasks accomplished,  
and then forgets about.”

He writes,

“Pilgrimage is a way of being in the world.

It is an acknowledgement

that no matter how good the present moment is,

it is nothing more than a way-station,  
a temporary stop along the way.”

By faith Abel knew it.

By faith Enoch knew it.

By faith Noah knew it.

Abraham knew it.

Issac knew it.

Jacob knew it.

Joseph knew it.

Moses’ parents knew it.

Moses knew it.

The Israelites knew it.

By faith, by faith, by faith – they were moved.

By faith they moved.

Therefore, since we are surrounded

by such a great cloud of witnesses, we can move too.

Where you may be trying to get to in this life is not an ultimate destination.

Where you think you want to end up in this life is not the end.

We are pilgrims whose destination is not,  
a new job,  
or a good relationship,  
or better health,  
or more money,  
or whatever we think the next destination is.

Because thing is, if you get to those places, you won't have arrived.  
If anything, those places can hold us up or tie us down.  
It is why we have this tendency to chronic dissatisfaction  
when we get somewhere.

We are built to be moving by faith.

There is a city whose architect and builder is God.  
That is where we are headed.

Pilgrimage is a way of being in the world.

It is an acknowledgement  
that no matter how good the present moment is,  
or how difficult it is,

it is nothing more than a way-station,  
a temporary stop along the way.

If you think the destination is only whatever your next goal is,  
or wherever, or whatever it is you are trying to get to in life  
you will be disappointed.

Lift your sights.

Eyes on Jesus,

so you do not grow weary or lose heart,  
so you can still be living by faith when your time comes.

Though it is sight unseen,

there is a city whose architect and builder is God.

That's where we're headed.

Everything else is a way-station, a temporary stop, a part of the journey.

The people in Hebrews 11 were longing for a better country –

as are we, a heavenly one.

Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God,

for he has prepared a city for them.

That is where we are headed.

So we believe and we walk, and keeping walking, by faith.

even though the Father's house

and the outcome of the work

and the outcome of the promise,

may be a distant point on the horizon

and may at this point be sight unseen.

We believe and we walk and keep walking by faith.

We fix our eyes on Jesus.

And walk our pilgrimage in the footsteps of Jesus,

We love.

We forgive.

We give.

We share.

We pray.

We bless.

We serve.

We believe, and we live, we walk, and even run, by faith,  
even if in this life, we won't see or receive the things promised  
from our obedience.

Because we know that what is being built and prepared by God,  
is far better country  
than any we try to prepare for ourselves.

Believe God. Get moving. Keep moving. By faith.

Amen.