
By Faith I Stood On The Dock

**A sermon by the Very Reverend Sam Candler
Atlanta, Georgia
Proper 15C of the Revised Common Lectionary**

By faith, the children of Israel passed through the Red Sea as if it were dry land.
Hebrews 11:29

By faith.

By faith, I stood again this summer on a dock, overlooking a deep lake, a deep and very cold and very black lake. In the summers, I travel to this lake in order to be refreshed, to restore my soul with the simplicity of the Canadian woods.

But the lake where I go is sometimes scary. It's been scary ever since I was a little boy. We didn't have an indoor shower or bath in those days. In order to bathe, we had to jump in the lake. Even when the temperature was cold, even when the sky was dark and dreary with no sun, we had to jump in the lake.

I still face that moment every summer. Will I jump into the water or not? How long will it take me? The water is fresh, but it is very dark. Usually, I cannot see more than a foot or so down into it.

But I've seen things come out of that water! I've seen some pretty big fish. The northern pike get up to three feet long, and they look like fresh-water barracuda. Every time I catch one on a fishing rod, I cut my fingers on its razor sharp teeth. I think there may be monsters in that dark, deep water.

By faith, the children of Israel passed through the Red Sea. I wonder if they had ever seen that water before. If they hadn't seen the Red Sea, they had surely seen the Nile River. They knew what rushing flood waters could do.

The children of Israel knew what kinds of monsters might be in the sea, too. They knew the consequences of marching into the sea. What in the world possessed them to do it?

As I stood on that dock in Canada, I remembered what I had seen the day before: a huge snapping turtle. Yes, the mean kind of snapping turtle, two feet long, with the most hideous head, I think, that God has ever devised. I saw that turtle swimming right under the dock. I think he might live there.

Did I tell you how cold that water is? This is not warm Georgia bath water. This is Canadian water, which spends half the year being frozen solid. Maybe I don't want to jump in after all.

By faith, the children of Israel jumped in.

A Sunday school teacher was delivering this lesson a few years ago. He was extolling the children of Israel. The children of Israel left their homeland! The children of Israel passed through the Red Sea! The children of Israel entered the promised

land! Then, a little girl raised her hand. She asked this question: "If the children of Israel were passing through the Red Sea, like you said, what were the adults of Israel doing?"

I tell you what they were doing. They were still standing on the dock, like me. They were worrying each other, with talk about the monsters in the water. They were reminding themselves of how it used to be back in the old days, back in Egypt - which suddenly didn't look so bad anymore. The place they used to complain about now looked good.

Yes, sometimes we know too much. We let the tears and fears of all our years paralyze us. We can't go through that water; we'll drown! I'm not going to jump in the water this year. The cold shock of the water is just too much. It would be easier to retreat inside and turn on the new hot water faucet.

While I was taking way too much time, deliberating about whether to jump off the dock, one of the children came running down the dock. He was running fast, flying! He kept right on running, and dove headfirst into the water. Then, I dove in, too.

By faith, the children of Israel passed through the Red Sea. I think pretty much all of them did. The adults did follow the children after all. They all passed through the Red Sea, symbolic now, for us, of the waters of baptism. That water is supposed to shock us like it does the infants we baptize here at the Cathedral. That water is supposed to be cold, bracing, refreshing, and restorative.

The beautiful eleventh chapter of Hebrews gives other examples of faith. By faith, Noah built an ark when there was not a cloud in the sky. By faith, Abraham left his homeland, not knowing where he was going.

"Faith," says Hebrews 11:1, "is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." This is one of the most critical verses of all scripture. What is this faith, toward which all of us Christians are striving? The old King James Version of the Bible translated it this way: "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."

But one of the greatest translations of Hebrews 11:1 came from Clarence Jordan, the man who started Koinonia Farms, in Americus, Georgia, the man who translated the Greek New Testament into rural Georgia dialect when he was not working on civil rights issues. For him, "faith is the turning of dreams into deeds; it is betting your life on unseen realities."

Betting your life on unseen realities. That's the kind of faith God is developing in us. Isn't it? I know it's not perfected yet, but God is working it out in us, just like God has been working it out in his people for generations. By faith, the people of Israel passed through the Red Sea.

By faith, the Vikings sailed down to the North American continent. By faith, Columbus sailed across the Atlantic Ocean. Faith is betting your life on unseen realities.

By faith, Bobby Cox fielded another baseball team this year, another team filled with new faces, new questions, and new dreams.

By faith, a young swimmer has persevered for nineteen years, and he won his first Olympic Gold medal today.

By faith, some folks began a daring new construction project at the Cathedral of St. Philip in Atlanta, Georgia. What we see today was only a dream one year ago.

By faith, a first-grader walked into a completely new environment this past week. By faith, a teacher faced another fresh set of eager faces, and some not-so-eager faces. By faith, a parent kissed his child and sent her into a brave new world.

By faith, one man bought a new business in Atlanta last week. Another man accepted a new job. By faith one person wrote a poem. By faith, one woman painted a house.

By faith, one woman spoke out against discrimination and injustice; she suffered complaints and sarcasm. But she lived by faith.

Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. Faith is the turning of dreams into deeds; it is betting your life on unseen realities.

By faith, the children of Israel passed through the Red Sea, and I -I in my own feeble way""I dove off a dock into the cold black water of Canada. The water was shocking, but, oh, "there lives the dearest freshness deep down things."

The righteous live by this faith. The righteous live in hope. That hope is based, finally, not on our own doing, or even on our own faith -God knows we never have enough. No, the hope of the righteous, the hope of the saints of God, is that God is faithful. When we do not have enough faith, God does. God will bring refreshment out of deep and dark water. God will bring dry land out of the Red Sea waters. God will turn our dreams into deeds. God is faithful.

Which dream of yours needs turning into reality today? Where do you need conviction of things unseen? Whose faith do you want to emulate today?

We are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses. In our history, and even in this room, we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses. Since we are, says the letter to the Hebrews, since we are surrounded by these great witnesses of faith -from first-graders to swimmers""let us lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God." (Hebrews 12.1-2)

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