

“The Long Haul”
 Romans 4:13-25
 February 28, 2021
 Rev. David Hutchinson

The term “long-haul” may have originated with the railroad.

In the late 1800s laws were developed around the cost of shipping.

Interstate shipping over long distances was considered a “long-haul”

The appropriate price of a long-haul compared to a short-haul was debated.

Now, whether that is the *origin* of the term I can’t say for sure.

But the term has been around for a while, and it’s used in many ways.

Over that last 100 years transportation of all kinds has changed, and we can go long distances in cars, and on busses and planes, as well as on the railroad. John Candy and Steve Martin showed us how challenging that can be in their 1980’s movie about it.

But it’s not just a term that applies to:

Planes, trains, and automobiles.

An area of concern for victims of the Covid virus is called: “long-hauler’s syndrome”.

More than that, from political candidates, to marriages...

...in the arena of employment - - as well as friendship - - and faith...

Sometimes we want to know: Are you in it for the “long-haul”?

In this morning’s Bible reading from Paul’s letter to the Romans, he IS.

Paul is in it for the long haul - - when it comes to faith.

And he gives advice for those of us - - who want to do the same.

If we are going to make the long-haul - - certain attributes are required.

The long haul requires: courage, strength, motivation and trust...

But from WHERE do these attributed come to us?

That is the question of this sermon.

In the next few minutes we will explore the question:

Where do the attributes required to go the long-haul come from?

Where does the - - trust and strength and courage to go the long-haul come from?

I'll start by considering some examples from outside the Bible.

Then I'll move to Paul...

The first thing to consider are possessions.

If we're going to make the long-haul in life don't we need a few possessions to give us comfort and to sustain us along the way? / Or is it better to be free of possessions. / An interview with a long-haul semi truck driver gives some insight, and then points us to the words of Paul about our inheritance.

Then secondly - - there are our ancestors who have gone before and show us the way.

Maybe our forbearers can help us make the long-haul.

And finally - - a third thing to consider - - maybe what it takes is inspiration of some sort.

SO let's go back to the first thing I suggested - - considering our possessions...

A couple of years ago a long-haul trucker named Finn Murphy was interviewed on the radio show "Fresh Air". According to the story, he was "completely seduced" by the open road, and has logged over a million miles. His gig is to move furniture. / He is entrusted with people's possessions. / A trucker who doesn't own much himself - - watches how meaningful possessions are to other people. / He said people see stuff on a continuum:

People in their 30s are accumulating; in their 70s they're eradicating, he said.

Getting spiritual about his job as it relates to people in their 70s he said:

“Movers understand the transitory nature of manmade things - - because we’re at the point when it gets thrown away. And if you can’t bring yourself to get rid of your stuff, your HEIRS or your DESCENDANTS will have NO such qualms at all!”

The attraction of long-haul trucking for Mr. Murphy is the freedom of the open road.

So to return my earlier question: what does it take to go the long haul?

Does it take having nice possessions that make life easier?

Probably not.

In fact they might even get in the way.

If we are going to have the courage and energy and strength and guts for the long haul we might actually find them on the open road. / If this long haul trucker is any indication - - one way to make the long haul better - - is to travel light.

And part of that is about how we relate to our ancestors and our descendants.

How can we live - - so that our children and those who come after us are respected?

How can we live - - so that we honor our ancestors and parents?

One way is to manage our stuff.

Accumulate when it’s appropriate and eradicate when it’s appropriate.

And what does all this have to do with the Bible you might ask?

What does this have to do with Paul and the reading from Romans?

My answer is: it’s about ancestors and heirs.

Paul was writing about Abraham.

Paul said that the ancient Hebrews inherited the faith through Abraham.

Abraham was faithful and then the faith was passed down for generations.

But followers of Jesus travel lighter.

And saying that is NOT intended - - to denigrate the Hebrews nor the Jews.

Abraham was incredibly faithful.

He is literally THE model for faithfulness.

And the Jews inherited that faith.

But according to Paul - - the thing the Hebrews inherited from Abraham - - comes to us who follow Jesus - - through Jesus - - through the promise of resurrection. / As Abraham was so shall WE be too. / Abraham's God raised Jesus. / And the justification given to Abraham through faith - - is given to followers of this new way - - through Jesus.

According to Paul Jesus is not some new departure from the norm.

Jesus is the CULMINATION of what God has been doing all the time.

We inherit the hope - - but without some of the baggage.

That's sort of how Paul describes it.

So again, what does it take to go the long haul?

It takes travelling light where possessions are concerned.

But it also takes honoring our inheritance and our heirs.

And that can be a balancing act sometimes.

Abraham is the one Biblical person who unites the three major world religions of Islam, Judaism and Christianity. / Abraham is called the father of faith. / He is a significant figure to contend with. / If you want to talk about faith - - you can't really do a complete job if you leave out Abraham. / So for Paul - - as he was trying to make sense of Jesus to the early followers - - he needed to contend with Abraham. / That's part of what's going on here in this part of Romans.

So thinking about Abraham - - leads to thinking about forbearers and ancestors.

Which I was doing while watching the Super Bowl.

I was just getting started thinking about this text from Romans.

It was still a month till I had to preach this sermon.

So I wasn't very far along. / I had just read the text a couple of times really.

But the Super Bowl turned out to be a pretty boring game.

To the point that I was daydreaming about the Bible during the game!

And then it hit me: Vince Lombardi!

That commercial using the computer generated image of Vince Lombardi almost preaching to America about getting back up after we were knocked down. / I had to go back after the game and find it on YouTube and listen to it again...

Vince Lombardi was functioning kind of like Abraham in this text.

If you want to talk about faith you need to at least mention Abraham.

And if you want to talk about football you have to at least mention Vince Lombardi.

After all the trophy is named after him!

If Paul could have watched that commercial - - do you think he would have said:

“That commercial referred to Lombardi for the same reason I referred to Abraham”

Because he is THE ancestor.

And if you're going to go the long haul with faith you have to contend with Abraham.

Like if you're going to go the long haul football wise...

On some level you have to contend with Lombardi.

If you've going to go the long haul in appreciating jazz you have to contend with:

Miles Davis, John Coltrane and Bill Evans.

They don't have to be your favorite musicians. But you can't totally ignore them.

If you're going to go the long haul with French cooking you have to at least give Julia Child a NOD of recognition...

They were all - - all these examples - - were on some level - - inspired.

And that brings me to my concluding point about going the long haul...

When you're in it for the long haul there's a certain INSPIRATION that comes.

Think now of the young poet Amanda Gorman.

She recited a poem at the Super Bowl, and at the inauguration of Joe Biden.

Her poem at the inauguration was called:

"The Hill We Climb"

That poem was certainly inspired.

And that poem was certainly an encouragement to the long haul.

As she wrote:

"Scripture tells us to envision

that everyone will sit under their own vine and fig tree

and no one will make them afraid.

IF we are to live up to OUR OWN TIME...

Then victory will NOT lie in the BLADE.

That's the promise we glide - - and the HILL we CLIMB.

If only we DARE!

Because being an American is more than a pride we inherit - -

from our ancestors...

It's a past we STEP INTO - - and how we REPAIR it..

While we have our eyes on the future...history has its eyes on us."

This poem is part of what has been called the “Black Renaissance” in an article in Time magazine. This Renaissance is a surge of creativity among Black artists.

These artists help us to step into the future - - if we let them.

Paul was writing to new believers who were trying to step into the future.

But the ancient history of the Hebrew people all that way back to Abraham was there.

And the history of faith can be a foundation or a burden.

According to Paul - - the future with Jesus - - was a fulfillment.

Paul encourages us to TRUST God for the long haul.

The trust - - and strength - - that it takes to go the long haul in life - - is offered.

According to Paul - - Jesus offers us that assurance.

Through his life, death, and resurrection, Jesus inherited the faith of Abraham.

And following Jesus is the way to that faith for all of us.

Whatever long haul we face, God has been at it longer, and is with us in it.

God has been at this for a LONG long long time...

God has been at this since before the time of Abraham.

And God has NOT given up on us humans yet!

We can have faith in that God and in Jesus.

God promised Abraham - - and God promises us:

God is with us for the long haul.

How ever long that takes.

Amen