

A sermon **“We Move by Faith”**
From Hebrews 11:1–3, 8–16
At Plymouth Presbyterian Church
St. Helens, Oregon
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So, you think Jesus Christ called you to be one of his disciples? Fasten your seatbelt. Put on your oxygen mask before attempting to help others. Prepare to relocate, hit the road, and prepare to believe the impossible. Jesus is notorious for taking people places they never thought they’d go—places they wouldn’t have chosen if left to themselves.

That’s the Jesus we meet in the Gospels: walking, teaching, moving, stirring people up. Assigning tasks well beyond their ability. Introducing them to people they might have otherwise avoided. And yet, what a ride. Follow Jesus, and you’ll be stretched, tested, changed. You’ll be taken somewhere—physically, emotionally, spiritually—that you would not have gone if the going had been left up to you.

One of the greatest surprises in my life of faith is how hard it is to keep up with Jesus.

I was taught to believe in God from a denomination that the only change for centuries was the service was now spoken in English not Latin, the priest now faced the people across the altar table – the Roman Catholic Church.

It was comforting to think there was something that didn’t change. The bolted-down pews, the ponderous pulpit, the hymns nobody sang anymore except us—one hour a week—offered stability in a world otherwise unpredictable.

But that’s not Jesus! He doesn’t stay where we put him. He doesn’t bolt himself to the floor. As Karl Barth said, Christians go to church to make our last stand against a living, unsettling God. People come singing “Just as I am,” but Jesus never leaves them that way. Gott nimmer ruhet, Barth said—God never rests.

Become a Christian, prepare to be changed. I didn’t plan to be in church every Sunday by being a preacher. Well, I did make a promise to God that if God could get my through a particularly brutal high school basketball practice I would go to church every Sunday. I did not intend to honor that pledge. But you just try to outrun the faithful prayers of a mother and grandmother. Good luck with that! So here I am, Sunday after Sunday. This was not my plan.

Follow Jesus, get ready to relocate. The foundation of the Christian faith is not a fixed worldview or a stone sanctuary, but Christ alone—“the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). The truth isn’t a proposition; the truth is a person. A person always on the move. Truth has feet. “Follow me,” says Jesus—and off he goes.

That’s why the writer of Hebrews describes the faithful as pilgrims. Abraham and Sarah, called by God, journeyed to a land they didn’t even know. They left everything familiar, setting out

with nothing but a promise. They never saw the city God promised—not in their lifetime. But they lived by faith in what they could not yet see.

Living by faith doesn't mean denying reality. It means trusting that there is more reality than what we can measure and weigh. Faith is "the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1).

Let me tell you a story.

After Walt Disney died, someone visited Disney World and said, "Isn't it a shame Walt didn't live to see this?" Mike Vance, a creative director, replied, "He did see it. That's why it's here."

Before there was a nail in Disneyland or Disney World, Walt had already ridden the rides—in his imagination. He saw it before anyone else did. The world scoffs at that kind of vision. But we know better. We know that faith always sees what is not yet. That's how God works too. God sees things before we do—and calls us to walk toward them.

It's tempting to think that only what we can test, taste, and touch is real. But the most enduring realities are often the least tangible. As Thornton Wilder imagined in *Our Town*, the return address on a letter to Jane Crofut traced her all the way back to "The Mind of God." That's where it all begins. Not in orange groves or open fields. Not in what is, but in what God sees—and in what God calls us to see.

Jesus is always pioneering ahead (Heb. 12:2), and we are called to follow. Not to explain or nail down Jesus—he won't sit still long enough for that. My job as a preacher isn't to fix Jesus in place for you. It's to give you what you need to journey with him without resenting the trip. To equip you for movement. To help you say each morning, "Tell me again, Jesus—where are we going today?"

Because when you walk with Jesus, things shift.

Sometimes your circumstances shift—unexpected illness, job changes, family upheaval. Sometimes the Holy Spirit does the shifting, just because that's what the Spirit does. You're pulled out of baptismal water and given the unsettling command: Follow. Go. Move. Be changed. The Spirit descends, and you become a nomad of the mind, a spiritual traveler, an itinerant disciple.

You'll know it's Jesus calling when you're being led somewhere hard, risky, even absurd. When someone asks, "What are you doing here?" all you can say is, "Ask Jesus." That's not a cop-out. That's a confession of faith.

The main assignment of the Christian life is to relinquish the delusion of control and allow yourself to be carried by the mercy of God into places you never thought you'd go. The church's job isn't to make you feel settled. It's to help you move when Jesus moves.

We're inheritors of Abraham and Sarah's story. We are pilgrims, pioneers, voyagers on the road of faith. And what sustains us isn't certainty—it's trust. Trust that God sees what we cannot yet see. Trust that God is real, and therefore the promises are real—even when they seem delayed. "This seeming tardiness of God," said J. Harry Cotton, "is the most severe test of faith." But faith waits. Faith believes.

Eventually, Sarah did laugh. She bore a son in her old age, and they named him Isaac—"laughter." She said, "God has made me laugh, and everyone who hears that I bore a son at this old age will laugh with me" (Gen. 21:6). She was right.

Faith leads to joy.

- So today, let me bless you:
- bless you for taking the risk.
- Bless you for saying yes to Jesus.
- Bless you for stepping into the future even when the destination is unclear.
- Bless you for trusting the unseen, the not-yet, the promise of a God who stirs, who speaks, who moves.

And the next time you get that feeling in your gut that God is leading you somewhere strange and new—don't be surprised. You're in good company. Abraham and Sarah, Paul and Timothy, Peter and Mary—they all said yes without knowing the full plan. They moved by faith. And so do we.

So tomorrow morning, when you rise, I hope you'll pray something like this:

"Jesus, where are we going today? I probably wouldn't go there on my own. But if you're going, count me in."

Amen.