

I read about a man who went shopping for a Harley Davidson motorcycle. The salesman talked about speed and power, acceleration and risk, he went into great detail about the fun of owning a Harley, he waxed lyrical about the women who like men who ride a Harley. Then the salesman found out that the guy was an Episcopal priest. Immediately his language, his tone of voice changed, the selling points of his sales pitch all changed. Now he described the good gas mileage that a Harley gets, practicality, ease of parking, visibility when riding. The Priest reflected on this experience in a book "Leading with Vision", where he wrote, "Have we told the world that being a Christian is more like riding a lawn mower than a motorcycle? Is the life of faith more safe and sound or dangerous and exciting? The common image of the church [it seems] is pure lawn mower – slow, deliberate, plodding." Then he offers his prescription, "Our task is to take the church out on the open road, give it the gas, and see what the old baby will do!"

Let's see what the old baby will do! Let's see what this old baby will do! This is our calling, this is our challenge, this is our task, this is our purpose in our passion for the life of our church as we live and express our faith in Jesus Christ - Let's see what the old baby will do!

As we launch into a new program year in the life of Oakland, as we allow our church wide theme of CONNECTING to describe and inspire our shared life we are being asked to have a wild, Harley Davidson-type motorcycle attitude towards the life of our church - "Let's see what the old baby will do!"

Today's reading from Hebrews 11 tells us how, for many years, Abraham and Sarah had experienced and shared faith that was like a lawn mower – faith that was all duty and obligation, but little new excitement. But then God intervened and asked them to switch gears and embrace a motorcycle faith! By faith they took themselves out on the open road to see what they could do! Abraham was old enough to be "as good as dead" when he set out on this "motorcycle journey" of faith, when he accepted God's itinerary for a treacherous trek westward "not knowing where he was going". It was a ticket to uncertainty and discomfort, sleeping in tents, living as a foreigner, dealing with all the tribes along the way! Abraham and his entourage were strangers in a strange land. Throwing caution to the desert wind, making sure he had his AARP Gold Card in his wallet, Abraham set off on this journey with and to God.

And, as if the journey itself wasn't enough, God interrupts Abraham and Sarah's geriatric retirement with a pediatric promise — they were going to have a baby and many descendants. We all know how taking kids on a car trip can be a nightmare! Cries of, "Are we there yet?" Spills, far-flung Cheerios, territorial wars – just imagine hauling along a woman who is pregnant or an infant on a desert trek through hostile territory!

The writer of Hebrews makes it clear that Abraham could just as easily have turned around and gone home — back to the comforts of Haran or Ur. But not Abraham – by faith he wasn't "thinking of the land that they had left behind", instead, by faith, he was focused on making a new home within the promises of God. By faith - Abraham and Sarah didn't play it safe – instead – by faith - they stepped up to the challenge — they got up, they got out, they got going, they got moving in new directions. For them it would be no vacation — Canaan, wasn't Club Med or Sandals, but the results and rewards were far greater than frequent flier miles - a new relationship with God, and a whole new, life-changing perspective on the world, a new sense of their place in the great plans and promises of God.

Our spiritual heritage is full of wanderlust. At some point, it seems that everyone in the Bible is traveling somewhere, motivated by God's promise of something new, around the next bend or over the next hill. All of them were motivated as were Sarah and Abraham – by faith! Faith, “the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” It is this same faith, our faith in Jesus Christ that today calls us to move out of our comfort zone. Having been called by faith, knowing God's call upon us to journey onward, the greatest danger is if we decide to stay put, that we get stuck right where we are, rather than embrace the call and the challenge of going together with God along the path God has for us towards the purposes that are ours in God!

Faith describes and shapes our relating to God because by faith we have come to discover that God loves us utterly! A young boy with the help of his grandfather carved a small boat to sail on their little pond. One day the wind was down and the boat would not sail, so he took it to the creek behind his house and put it into the stream of swift moving water. The boat quickly outdistanced the boy's ability to keep up with it while running along the bank. It was gone. Many years later the boy now grown saw his boat in a shop and went up to speak to the owner. “That boat in the window is mine. My grandfather and I carved it from a block of wood.” “I do not know about that, but I bought it from a kid for four dollars and it is for sale for six!” The man thought about his love for the boat and his love for his now deceased grandfather who helped him carve it. He pulled out his money and bought the boat. As he left the store he said, “You are twice mine. I made you and now I have bought you.”

My friends, in faith, you have come to understand and experience that you belong to God, twice over. Here is the news, ever old and ever new, God made you; God made us; God made the world – thus made we belong to God. In Jesus Christ, God has embraced and filled our lives all over again, in order that we can share the full blessing of God's life and God's love with all people – in Jesus Christ God has claimed and reclaimed forever. As we heard in Luke, it is God's gift, God's pleasure, to give us the kingdom. In response to this gift we are to be ready to trust God with our treasures and our lives! Our relationship with God can never be a one-way street in which all we do is expect for ourselves. Rather, we are to order our lives, in response to all God is and all God has done for us in our Lord.

This is why in Jesus' parable we discover that the master's expectations, God's expectations, come first, before the needs of the servants, or us disciples. To live faithfully is to have our wicks trimmed and our lamps lit, to be ever vigilant and watchful looking for the master's return, keeping the books accurately, using our talents wisely, being attentive to the needs of the “least of these my brothers and sisters”, as we seek to live faithfully following our Master.

Oakland Avenue Presbyterian Church is a church built and founded upon faith, a church brought to where we are today by and in faith, and we are a church in which faith alone will take us forward as God intends. It was faith that first inspired the vision to establish a new church in this developing area of the city around the newly arrived Winthrop College. It was faith that saw local churches and the Presbytery stewards their resources of people and funds to bring this vision into being. It was and is faith that calls us to make common cause forming this fellowship that we are proud to call our church home.

We are being asked to see what the old baby will do

- By being alert to the new, changing and very real needs of our community.

We know Rock Hill and York County and South Carolina has and is changing. God's love and care for the world and for all people asks us to continually demonstrate and share a deep and real and full measure hospitality and welcome to all of our neighbors.

We are being asked to see what the old baby will do

- By serving people in need, in places near and far.

All of our gardens can become Hope Gardens as we plant and grow and share the bounty of the earth. All of us can be praying for, caring for, supporting those who teach in our schools, offer medical care in our hospitals and hospices, people seeking to educate and build community and end prejudice and discrimination.

We are being asked to see what the old baby will do

- By engaging with and welcoming partnerships with all of our neighbors. Students, faculty, staff at Winthrop; families of every size and make-up in your community; individuals of every background and inclination.

We are being asked to see what the old baby will do

- By going out of our way to invite and welcome and engage people new to the faith, people new to our church, people new to our community.

It will take the active and faithful participation of every member of our church to propel us forward into the future which God has for us.

Joyous and faithful participation in worshipping God, caring for God's people and following God's will for our lives will lead us into the future.

It is by CONNECTING, CONNECTING to God, to one another, to the needs of all our neighbors and to the future which God is opening for us, that we will truly be able to see what the old baby will do!

The four elements of CONNECTING – connecting to God, to one another, to the needs of all our neighbors and to the future, touch and challenge each and all of us.

The four elements of CONNECTING are truthful – they describe who we are and who we will continue to become as a church.

The four elements of CONNECTING are reflective – reflecting who it is we know God to be, what God asks us to do, who God asks us to be and to become.

The four elements of CONNECTING are consistent – woven together they express very well the faith and compassion and excitement that God is and will place into our hearts and minds.

The four elements of CONNECTING are appropriate – describing very clearly and succinctly how it is we must use all the resources with which we have blessed by God – as we give and contribute generously, as we faithfully and passionately devote our time, talents and treasure in gratitude for the love of God that calls us to faith.

The four elements of CONNECTING are truthful, reflective, consistent, and appropriate. That is why I am excited that God is excited to offer all of us so many opportunities for faith and spiritual development, welcoming and caring, sharing and serving, witnessing and demonstrating in all we are and do to our Lord and Savior. God has something special to say to us, God is saying to us, "My friends, Let's see what the old baby will do!" Amen.