

**The Future is Behind Us**  
**Robert P. Boell**  
**Hebrews 11: 1-4, 8**

No, the sermon title is not a misprint. Supernumerary office person Barbara Drain would not let such slip through. It is, however true, we often suggest the future being ahead of us - the past behind.

That is not the way the Tuvan people think. They are a small culture in central Asia. For the Tuvans the past is in front of you. If you think about it, of course it is. You can see and know the past. It is out front there.<sup>1</sup>

Here they are folks (hold up notes). Notes from my second sermon preached from Westminster pulpit. Somewhere I have notes from the first sermon but couldn't find. I was a college student. It was short sermon - and that was before now pastor emeritus Dr. Young wrote his book for preachers "Be Brief About It." Here it is folks - program for the church's 16th anniversary, 1908. We can see the past - view what they did, analyze it. I was not there! Planners and schemers for Westminster's 125<sup>th</sup> have been parading a lot of the past before our eyes and ears. The point, the past is in front of us - you can see it. But the future, say the Tuvans, sneaks up on you from behind. You can never see the future - the space/time metaphor so familiar to us is reversed.

It is a tricky balance between past and future we navigate here. I do not believe we are in danger of forgetting our past, even as we anticipate the future sneaking up behind.

So it was for Abraham. Hebrews 11:8, "*By faith Abraham obeyed when he had been called...and he set out not knowing where he was going.*" Ah yes, that future sneaking from behind - pushing him and wife Sarah and a host of others forward. The Bible is full of characters who went out "*not knowing where they were going.*"

How easy it is to argue: "*Why should I refuse the pleasure of the moment for an uncertain future?*" The Christian answer is: the future is not uncertain - unknown, perhaps, but not uncertain - because - it belongs to God. The other part of that Hebrew text is Abraham went into that unknown knowing it was with God. There is a certain reckless willingness to this adventure. If faith can see every step of the way it is not faith! Christianity offers us the faith we need to imagine and cope with the surprises, changes, opportunities and trauma the future will present. Ours is a timeless pilgrimage.

In this present pilgrimage it is a particularly difficult time to be the church. The culture in which we live no longer provides even tacit support for the Christian story. There is pressure to cater to ways and whims of the world rather than transform as disciples of Jesus Christ. But, being disciples of the risen Lord makes it a grand time to venture into that unknown future.

Abraham went out not knowing where he was going. Moses went not knowing. Naomi and Ruth went not knowing. The disciples went post-Pentecost not knowing.

Canfield Jones, Westminster's first pastor, did not fully know where he was going with this new congregation.

Dr. Williamson, 34 years pastor, hadn't a clue what was ahead.

My dad couldn't comprehend the ministry in store.

Bob Young arrived in 1966 not knowing the many ministries in store, including a transition to new space.

Don Lincoln, when he first glimpsed this building while driving up 202, didn't know.

New members received today - can see our past, but cannot see the future.

All of us coming to This Table, very soon, know not what it might hold. But the operative word for all, and our text, "*Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.*" Faith - that leap knowing God is going with us.

As we feel the nudge of the future from behind - for our sake let's call it Holy Spirit - keep worship central. Reach out in mission. While roots are deep, never cease to vision and dream where that nudge might lead. Take some risks for the Lord. Consider what makes Westminster Church sing. Cherish tradition but also think outside that proverbial box.

That fellow, and I think it was a fellow, who thought outside the box and invented the wheel, what did he get? a revolution. Get it?? We are in a revolution for the Lord.

The past is in front of us – we can see it. The future sneaks from behind. "*Abraham went out not knowing where he was going...*" BUT, he went in faith knowing God was with him.

So good people of Westminster Presbyterian Church, in that Abrahamic faith, brave journeying to you - til we reach home, our real home.

Amen.

1. David Harrison - quoted by Tom Becker in *Three Taps of the Gavel*, Chautauqua Institution, August, 28, 2016. (Three Taps...)