

Sermon, *What is Hebrew for Faith – Emunah!*  
The Very Rev. David J. Marshall, All Angels 3.1.26

Genesis 12:1-4a  
Romans 4:1-5, 13-17  
John 3:1-17  
Psalm 121

I'd like to teach you a Hebrew word. Emunah (Eh-moo-NAH). It is Hebrew for faith. Emunah has three aspects to it that I think you'll find interesting. First, faith is described this way: first you do and then you understand. Secondly, faith is not believing in a set of statements about God; faith is rooting oneself, anchoring oneself, to the character of God. The third part is faith (Emunah) is for the repair of the world. In the faith repair toolbox there are two tools: light and love. I know this is a lot of information so let me break it down for you.

Faith is a doing and not an understanding. We are called to act in faith without understanding. Once we act, however, often we will then understand. If we wait to understand, we will not act in faith.

Faith in God's character. What are the character traits of God, Scripturally speaking? If that's too large of a topic, let's look at it this way: what does God promise. "I will never leave you or forsake you." "I am with you always." "I will watch over and protect." God, as shown in Scripture, is provider and protector. God's character is to help those who are lost – to be a light and to be salvation. God sees everyone, especially those who are not seen, or lauded, by others. God identifies with the widow and the orphan. These are some of God's character traits. Faith, then, is believing that we can root ourselves, we can anchor ourselves, to God's character.

Faith is a repairer of a broken world. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, we started to think of faith as personal salvation. While that is true, faith's activity in the world is for repairing. How faith repairs is with light and love. Light has a few different meanings. Making someone's burden light is one of them. Faith repairs by helping others with their burdens. Light is also a way to illuminate a path. Light is representative of hope (and hope can heal a broken world). Love, in this context, is exemplified by forgiveness. Praying for our enemies. Love is sitting with someone when they are not acting their best. It is this love that heals.

In today's Scripture lessons, you will see Emunah played out. Abraham did not wait to understand God's call. We went, in faith, to the promised land. Later, I think he understood. Abraham went out not because of his own character but because of God's character – I will be with you/protect you/guide you/bless you. Abraham had faith in the character of God and that God is faithful. Because of Abraham's faith, every family on earth has been blessed. That is another way to say that the world is being repaired because of his faith.

In our passage from Romans, Paul talks clearly about Abraham's faith that led to God's free gift of grace for everyone. Grace is God's character, it is light and love, it repairs a broken world.

Lastly, let's look at Nicodemus from the Gospel lesson. Before he said a word to Jesus, he went to go see him. Nicodemus didn't understand why; he went. He then got a little confused, but he stuck with it. He said to Jesus – first thing – “We know that what you are doing is from God. No one can do these things apart from God.” Nicodemus knew God's character and saw it in Jesus's actions. I'd say that Nicodemus had already anchored himself in God's character – in faith – and then saw it in Jesus. Here's the part that really has my attention: Nicodemus's conversation with Jesus – just the two of them – got retold (probably by Nicodemus), then written down by John the Gospel writer, and is now the most well-known piece of Scripture. Nicodemus had no idea that when he met with Jesus that nearly 2,000 years later, at every American college football game, someone would hold up a sign that quotes their conversation.

John 3:16 and 17 repair a broken world: God so loved the world that he sent his only son so that the world would be saved through him. Indeed, God did not send his son to condemn the world but so that the world would be saved.

That passage, to me, highlights the third aspect of Emunah/faith – light and love to repair a broken world. God didn't come to condemn. God came to save. It's God's character to save. We don't have to understand it. We simply get to act in faith with it.

One more thing about faith. The Apostle Paul wrote in chapter 13 of his first letter to the Corinthians this: faith, hope and love remain; the greatest of these is love.

Hope has a way of bubbling up inside of us, especially when times are the darkest. I believe that hope is implanted by God and bubbles up and shines light in a dark place. Love too bubbles up. Again, planted by God, love is in us and bubbles up and overflows to others. I believe then that faith also bubbles up, planted by God, then to repair a broken world. Where is faith bubbling up inside of you?

When I was a VA chaplain, I was assigned to the in-patient hospice ward. I was freaked out about death and being our dying people so my boss put me right in the middle of it. (Now that's faith!) On my second day, I was told to go into a room of someone who was having a crisis of faith. I walked into Joe's room that afternoon, sat down, introduced myself, and asked him to tell me about himself. The story he told me was when he was much younger, in an amphibious vehicle, near the 58<sup>th</sup> parallel, the vehicle caught on fire and started taking on water. He smiled and said, “You know, humans need air to live, right?” I smiled and nodded; then said, “What happened.” He told me how he (and the others) made it out safely. I said, “What does that say about God?” Emotion passed across the Marine's face. He said, “You know, God has been watching over me my whole life. Because that is who God is.” I then asked, “Do you feel stuck right now, like you're in a vehicle that's on fire and taking on water?” He nodded a tearful yes. I suggested that he talk to God tonight because God has always watched over him.

The next day I went into room 3 to see Joe. It was completely empty. The nurse told me he passed away at 2 a.m. peacefully.

I didn't wait to understand everything there was to know about hospice – following Abraham in faith, I simply walked into the room. ... later I understood. I watched the character of God come through. I saw how light and love repair a broken world, and, in this case, a broken Marine who was holding on tightly to this world that needed a little nudge to let go and place his faith in God.

Abraham was quite old when he went out in faith (not understanding). I am convinced then that we, of any age, can have faith bubble up inside of us. Let me ask you a question: what is bubbling up for you right now? What is God bubbling up in faith, hope and love, inside of you this week? Are you waiting to understand before you act? Or, in faith, are you rooting yourself in God's character. Are you willing to follow your faithful inclination and see how God is going to repair this world with light and love?

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.