

St. Andrews Lutheran Church, Tallebudgera QLD

17th August 2025 – Tenth Sunday after Pentecost

Hebrews 11:29 – 34,39-40, 12:1-2

BY FAITH

Many of us like to have photos up around the place; on our walls, on our cupboards and desks, wherever it is we can easily see these pictures throughout the day. Nowadays we can take these photos with us on our phones, and digital photo frames mean the one frame can display hundreds of photos over time. Some of these photos are of places and events we want to remember, pictures of nature we have found beautiful, and of course people who are special to us and who we wish to remember. To take that last group a bit further, sometimes people have a wall of their house filled with old photos of their grandparents, great parents, great-great grandparents, which makes both a feature wall but also reminds us where we come from and of the people who have played a role in making us who we are today. My parents have a wall like this in their house, and sometimes when I am looking at photos of my grandparents, who I knew, my great grandparents, who I knew a bit, and my great-great parents, who of course I never knew, I wonder; if they could see out on to our lives today, what would they think? How different would their lives be to mine? They would be blown away by the technology of the TV, smart phones, and the car parked outside the window. With our electric stoves and ovens, fridges and freezers, washing machines and dishwashers, they would probably think life is a whole lot easier than many of them had it. The things we talk about are probably also very different to what filled their lives and conversations.

But many things they would also see as being very similar to their times. Family and relationships were still very important and central, as we see by the number of these pictures which are either wedding photos or family portraits. But as together as these photos make everyone look, no doubt tensions within families, and even in relationships, were there as much then as they are with us today. We can also be sure that as much as we may look on our ancestors with awe and respect, they weren't perfect; they were people just as much as we are, with all the strengths and the faults

which go along with that. But, in many of their cases, by faith they made their way through life, celebrating the joys, facing the struggles, just like we do. For many of them, through their faith God was able to carry them through the struggles they faced, and work through their strengths and weaknesses, just like He does with us today.

When we look back on the people who have gone before us, we can relate to them not just because we want to be like them in their strengths, but also because we are like them in their struggles.

The ‘photos’ we have of Old Testament characters in Hebrews 11 has been likened to one of those photo walls we might have of our ancestors in our homes. Again, we get to look at these people who we are connected to through our faith, and at how God working in and through them influences and shapes our lives still today. Moving on from our reading last week, now we read about the Israelites crossing the Red Sea when they left slavery in Egypt, the walls of Jericho falling down when the people walked around that city for seven days. There is Rahab with a shady past not only welcoming the Israelite spies, but later even being listed as one of Jesus’ ancestors. Also, people like Samson, King David, and Daniel with the lions is alluded to.

Like those photos we have on our walls, the ‘portraits’ we have on this ‘photo wall’ make them all look very faultless. But we know that when we go into their stories this isn’t the case. They were as human as we are. Not only did they have their weaknesses, but their journey of life and faith had the same ups and downs, joys and struggles, victories and defeats, as ours does. They even had doubts like we do, and for some of them they went completely away from God until hitting rock bottom caused them to turn back to Him again.

By faith, God was able to work in and through these people, just like He works in and through us in all we face today. We might not normally face foreign armies, or our city falling down around us (although sadly some today still do), or lions whose mouths need to be shut so they don’t devour us, but what are the struggles which we do face? People are people, throughout history, so the tensions in families and relationships faced by these Old Testament people, and our own ancestors from two or three generations ago, are still with us today. We face concerns about our future, and the

future of those we love. We struggle with what it means to live out our faith today; how do we apply and live out various teachings, it can get so confusing especially when even Christians seem to be saying and doing different things. We can struggle with our priorities in our lives, with our time, money, gifts and talents; how much to apply to ourselves, to our family, to our community, to God? We can struggle with what it means to both have faith and to live out that faith, in all areas of our lives. By faith, we have been called on life's walk, but it's not always a smooth and flat path.

But by faith we have God's love in all we go through. We have a big advantage over those people from the Old Testament, and that is while they were looking forward to God's promise of a Saviour, we can now look to Jesus know this promise has been fulfilled. As our reading finishes, at the beginning of chapter 12, we are given Jesus as the example, inspiration, and the strength for us to go forward in faith: 'We must keep our eyes on Jesus, who leads us and makes our faith complete. He endured the shame of being nailed to a cross, because he knew later on he would be glad he did. Now he is seated at the right side of God's throne!' (*Heb. 12:2 CEV*) Keep our eyes on Jesus, who makes our faith complete. Know Him through reading and hearing God's Word in your life. Remember that you are His through the guarantee of adoption into His family in your baptism. Receive His body and blood with the bread and wine in Holy Communion to find comfort in knowing that He endured the shame of being nailed to the cross for the forgiveness of your sins. Know that His support is with you when you follow Him well, and His forgiveness when you don't. That He celebrates with you in the good things of life, and comforts you in the sad. By faith, and for us that also means faith in what God has done for us through Jesus, we know God's love carries and supports us in all we go through.

And looking back again at the people whose stories are touched on in Hebrews 11; by faith we are saved and God is able to work in and through us. Think about some of their stories: Rahab was a 'fallen woman', but not only was she accepted into God's people, she is listed in the Bible as one of the ancestors of Jesus Himself. Gideon doubted God's call to lead the army, calling himself the least of the least, testing God again and again, but he went on to lead God's people to great victory.

Samson was given a great gift of strength, but he used that strength to gain power for himself and to be popular with the ladies, until the very end when he gave his life in service to God. God works through our weaknesses and our strengths; He works through the ordinary you. And we have even more reason to hope in that, and to keep moving forward, because the hope we have rests in Jesus. That's why the picture this reading finishes off with is one of a race; looking ahead at what Jesus has done for us, not behind at our failings, not to the side at the distractions. By faith we can hold on to the new life God gives to us in Jesus, the hope this brings, and that we can now continue to go forward in Him.

By faith we know we are loved, we are called, we are saved. By faith we know that as we go through life, just like our family before us, just like those people from the Bible, it won't always be a race run on a smooth and straight track. But, by faith, we know that in Jesus God is with us, and God forgives us, so in Him we will receive all God wants to give us. By faith, know God's love in your life every day, as you receive the hope, the peace, and the life which can only come through Him. Amen.

FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION/REFLECTION

- Do you have any photos which you display in your home or workspace? Are they of family members or other people, events, or nature? Do you, or someone you know, have a display of older photos of your ancestors?
- Do you have a favourite person from those listed in Hebrews 11? If so, what is it that you like about that person? If you don't know much about anyone listed there, take the time to look up their story in the Bible.
- What are the struggles you go through in your life; those things which stop you running the straight race? What does it mean for you that God through Jesus is helping you through these things? If there is anything in particular you are struggling with, bring it to God and ask for His help.
- How easy is it for you to run the race with your eyes fixed on Jesus? Are there times or circumstances when you find this especially difficult? Reflect on how God worked in and through the lives of those mentioned in Hebrews 11, perhaps your own ancestors, and pray for God's guidance and strength to run the race and receive everything He wants to give us.

Pray: thank God for those who have gone before us, and for the inspiration and example we receive from them. Pray for help to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus and to live as those who are forgiven and called by Him.

*Pastor Andrew R. Koehler
17.08.2025*