



ALIVE AND KICKING

A Sermon on Living Faith

By

Sharon Rose Joy Ruiz-Duremdes

CENTRAL PHILIPPINE UNIVERSITY
ILOILO CITY, PHILIPPINES



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Hebrews 11:1, 7

Introduction

When I was younger, one of my favorite radio programs was Children's Hour over Station DYRI. Every Sunday afternoon at 3:00, the station would come alive with squirming kids of all sizes and smells, wanting to sing on the air. I believe it was not so much the experience of singing as the prizes that every child received. The young singing stars would intone their songs which sounded more like recitations than songs and waited excitedly for cokes and soap and crackers and what have you.

I remember very vividly one little kid sing: "Walk with **feet** in your heart and you'll never walk alone" While the song was really "walk with faith in your heart . . ." the little boy wasn't too far from the truth. For walking with one's feet does get you somewhere. We often hear people say: "Put feet to your plans and dreams so you can bring them to fruition." And perhaps this is what living faith means — putting feet to our faith.

Transition

The theme for this semester's Christian Emphasis Week is "LIVING FAITH". This being the first day of this important week, I invite you to consider with me what faith really means. What does it mean when we say we have faith in God?

I would like to say that faith is a gift of God. It is given to you when you ask for it. Faith does not spontaneously emerge from within a person. We say we have faith that a doctor can make us well only because we have seen clear evidences of his skill in making sick people well. A woman has faith in her husband because she has seen his fidelity. This is why we sometimes

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lose faith in people or in God — faith is not automatic. At one time, we were talking about how to restore the Filipino's faith in their leaders. Faith is a gift. It is a gift from God.

Another thing I want to say: here is that faith is not an intellectual assent to a fixed creed. Being able to say "I believe in God the Father . . ." does not give a person faith. Being able to recite your club creed at every meeting does not make you a faithful member of that organization for I have seen many Rotarians or Jaycees or Lions sanctimoniously say their creed and then turn around and negate the very essence of that creed. A man may have an intellectual belief in everything his creed says and not have faith at all.

Faith, my dearly beloved, is an adventure of the spirit, a "going out of the whole inner life in response to something we believe to be supremely worthwhile." As E. Stanley Jones puts it: Faith is the wagering of the life, and not merely nodding of the head. It is not discussion; it is decision. It is the launching out on the highest hypothesis I know — with my life. I don't believe in a thing unless I act on it. I don't believe in Christ unless I am prepared to wager all to follow him. That is faith.

When we talk about living the faith, we almost instantaneously think about sacrificing . . . even dying for our religion. We cite the martyrs of old who had no qualms about being fed to the beasts just to defend their faith. I believe there is an even more difficult and profound way of living out our faith than committing "spiritual harakiris" for the cause of Christ. It is easier to die but living out the faith in the humdrum of everyday existence is much more difficult for when you slip, people do not give you respite from criticism.

Hebrews 11:1 which is the text for our Christian Emphasis Week defines faith. But I wish to go beyond the definition — to ask what faith does for a person. In the same chapter of Hebrews, verse 7 Noah's name is mentioned as one sterling example of living faith. The Old Testament account in Genesis 6—8 tells us that the earth was so wicked that God decided that there remained nothing to do but to destroy it. He told Noah His purpose of judgment and instructed him to build an ark in which he and his family and the representatives of the animal creation might be saved. With reverence and obedience Noah took God at His word, and believed what God told him, and so in the destruc-

tion of the world he was preserved. Because of this, Noah has been called a man of faith. In his life we see how this faith in the living God gave meaning and purpose to his existence.

I. Firstly, we see that Noah took God at His word. He believed the message which God sent him. The message might have seemed like foolishness at the moment, it might have looked highly improbable but Noah accepted God's word and staked everything on it. I would like to turn around the situation a little bit to make a point about our faith in God. I believe that a person who has a living faith can be taken at his word. You can stake your life on what he says. You can bet on what he says for he will do it. Therefore, he does not say things he is incapable of accomplishing.

A lot of our frustrations and problems today, my friends, stem from the fact that many cannot be depended upon to follow through with what they say. They promise to teach Sunday School but are nowhere to be found on Sunday. They promise to give this amount to the church but the treasurer's record shows back pledges amounting to a thousand pesos. They promise their children some kind of award for good performance in school but never get around to doing it. They promise to join the church's choir but never show up for choir rehearsals. They sign commitment cards to be active in BYF but stand around to watch the organization die.

A story is told of a young boy and a young girl. They were carrying on a relationship much to the displeasure of both parents. Naturally, the parents did not approve because they were very young. So everything was done to keep them apart. But love is determined, they say, and nothing could keep the two apart. It was getting more and more difficult for them so they decided it was far sweeter to end their lives together than suffer all this agony. It was going to be suicide through drowning. At the appointed time, the young couple met at the river just behind the girl's house. Tearfully, they said their last good-byes — their unending promises — not even death could kill their love for they were to see each other again in the next life — oh, they said it romantically — in the typically corny Filipino melodrama. The decision was that they were to shut their eyes and the girl would give the signal to jump and they would jump. Then after a brief

moment, the girl said, "Jump!" The boy with eyes shut but with face all aglow with fidelity jumped and the swirling current carried him to his watery grave. Meanwhile, the girl stood at the bank of the river clutching a dream — a memory. End of drama. Ah yes, they would both jump but that day the river was a mute witness to a young girl whose dependability was limited to lip service.

Dearly beloved, our living faith in God should make us dependable for our God is a dependable God. When he makes promises, you can claim His promises.

II. Secondly, we see that Noah was not deterred by the mockery of others. Here he was building an ark for a flood when the sun was as bright as could be. He looked like a fool and people could not help but make fun of him. Friends, I believe that a person who has living faith is one who can stand his ground and not sacrifice his Christian values for a promotion or a raise or a connection. He is also one who can face being made fun of. It may often happen that the man who takes God's word looks like a fool. He may have to adopt a course of action which looks like madness. He may have to abandon many of the things on which the world sets a high value because he has discovered a new scale of values.

A man had joined a club where club meetings were never complete without cocktails and hard drinks. He had grown up to stay away from such manly activities. It wasn't too long when his club mates discovered his "peculiarity." At one club meeting, the waiter brought him a milk formula in a nursing bottle. The club members roared with laughter but they set their eyes on him to watch his reaction. The man took the nursing bottle graciously, raised it and announced to a hushed audience: "Friends, I would like to make a toast, Birch Tree! It's everybody's milk!" No resentment, no rancour in his heart — only a quiet acceptance that he was different and could not do what the others were doing.

The Bible says: "Blessed are you when men shall revile you and persecute you and shall say all manner of evil against you."

Our faith in God should give us courage to go on in spite of what others may say about us. Our faith in God should lead us to say "no" when principles are at stake. I realize this goes against our cultural trait of pakikisama, but the Bible says that the wis-

dom of God is so often foolishness with men and we must choose which side we will align ourselves with. It is one of the hardest challenges of Christianity to sometimes be prepared to be a fool for the sake of Jesus the Christ.

III. Finally, we see that Noah wasted no time but went and built an ark and saved his family, so the Bible says. Two things are shown here: Noah set out to work as soon as he was told and he must have done a good job on that ark for the Bible says he saved his family, not to mention all those beasts. Very clearly, we see that our living faith leads us to action. I do not wish to elaborate on this point since I mentioned it here before when I spoke during Youth Sunday. I would just like to remind you that Christians do not just sit there and wait for things to happen. I have discovered a most curious phenomenon. At a disco or a dance session, a person who sits at the sidelines and watches the dancers is most critical. She makes all sorts of cutting remarks like: "Ay abaw si Kuan ho, indi gid angayan, nagsali sang kido-kido sa tunga ... ay 'baw si Kuan ya ay, styling iya bayo ba, katambok pro — nagtulutak-in . . . kag si Kuan ya ay, palak lang obra ya!" But the people in the thick of the action don't mind if they are angayan or not. They are out there enjoying themselves.

The scribes and the Pharisees, for they sat back and watched Jesus and his band of disciples, had nothing good to say about them. They were forever finding fault with them. Does the University Church have its share of inactive pew sitters who make it their responsibility to do nothing but criticize?

And the other thing about Noah as I said was the fact that once he set his mind on doing his work, he did a good job of it. Living faith erases substantial compliance from our vocabulary. A Christian is thorough — he does his work well for he takes after his God who gave nothing but the best.

My friends, we cannot in conscience sing "Give Of Your Best to the Master" when we come to our classes unprepared; when we give exams for spite; when we determine whether our students pass or fail by the number of Georgette blouses and imported jewelry they have gifted us with; when we spend precious class hours talking about our children's accomplishments which have nothing to do with the topic for the day.

Christian Emphasis Week is upon us and for us, Christian educators, we will again be called upon to make alive that which we profess. As in ordinary days but more so during this week, our colleagues, and students will be seeking clear evidence of our living faith in God. The speakers alone cannot bring about conversions. Everyone of us who claim to be Christians will be expected to be living testimonies to a living God.

Conclusion

In our classrooms and offices this week — when persons tend to forget and disregard God, let it be said that you and I so lived that we proved beyond reasonable doubt that God was the supreme reality in the world. Let it be said that the members of the University Church kept God's laws when other men broke them; that they revered God when other men laughed at Him. Let it be said that, like Noah, the Christians of the University Church pierced the dark skepticism of the world with their shining faith in God - the living faith which gives meaning and purpose to human life.

This is the third booklet of speeches on topics of lasting interest published by CPU in School Year 1982-1983.

Sharon Rose Joy Ruiz-Duremdes

MS. SHARON ROSE JOY RUIZ-DUREMDES is the oldest daughter of Dr. and Mrs. Macario B. Ruiz. She attended Kindergarten, Elementary, High School and College at Central Philippine University. In 1967 she brought honor to her school by being chosen as one of the Ten Outstanding Students of the Philippines. She was the only junior in the group. She earned a Bachelor of Arts degree (Magna Cum Laude) in 1968. Upon graduation, she was the recipient of the Alma Mater Prize, the highest award given to any graduating senior; the Rotary Gold Medal for being the Most Outstanding Graduate, and the Dramatist of the Year Award.

Immediately after graduation, she served as a volunteer student worker at the Balai Mahasiswa Baptist in Semarang, Indonesia, teaching English as a Second Language. She pursued a Master of Arts degree in Speech-Communication at the University of Hawaii and then a Master's in Religious Education at the Berkeley Baptist Divinity School, California, U.S.A.

Presently she is teaching Speech and Drama, Religion and Ethics, and Christian Education at the University. She is an accredited resource person on Communication, Group Dynamics and Leadership by the Civil Service Commission and the National Manpower and Youth Council, Region No. VI.

She holds the distinction of being the first woman President of the Iloilo Kasapulan of Baptist Churches.

She is married to Atty. Nery Duremdes, a practicing lawyer and a Professor of Law at Central Philippine University, with whom she has two daughters, Mitzi May and Lily Joyce.