

I've been joking with my family that I'm currently in the midst of my "ship era." Not nearly as catchy as some of Taylor Swift's eras, but here we are. The reason for this is that I have read back to back books which took place on 17th century Dutch trading ships and then when we were in OBX last week, we wandered around the replica of the QEII and I had to have looked ridiculous for all my jaw ajar fascination with all of the nooks and crannies. So after 800 pages of reading and a saunter around this boat, I can say unequivocally that I would not have been equipped for maritime culture.

The whole thing blows my mind. These boats that were built by the Dutch and English in the 1600's were *huge*, four decks, the length of a football field and a half, and no GPS under than the stars. It fascinates me that all of these people just willingly signed on for this kind of life. The stories that I was reading about involved voyages that would take Dutch ships from Amsterdam to what is now modern day Jakarta. So we are talking, coming down around Portugal, cutting out across western Africa with a small stop for supplies, then because of the currents, cutting over towards Brazil in order to make your way around the Cape of Good Hope, and then on through the Indian Ocean towards western Australia so you can cut up to the Indies. We are talking *nine months* at sea, at least. Nine. Months. Dealing with storms and waves, scurvy, rodents, terribly smelly

people, and the threat of pirates. All for what? And that is the question that fascinated me. Why sign on for this? What was calling people halfway around the world in dangerous circumstances? In short: nutmeg.

I mean, that was *one* of the reasons, but ultimately that was a big part of it, spices. There was trust and hope that in the Indies was the source of their fortune, spices never before heard of, riches and wealth that could not be enumerated, promises of gold and gems. And for some, it was the promise of family. Women would sail alone in the hopes of reuniting with husbands who had sailed off years prior, some of whom they hadn't necessarily heard from in months. Some of the men signed on because they had no other choice, life and circumstance led them to these boats with the hope that life there had to be better than life here. They needed a second chance, a fresh start, they just had to get through the nine month voyage first. And that was assuming they knew where they were going and weren't going to be blown off course by a stray storm, and that the hand drawn maps that they had on board were accurate.

Every single person, every single time they got on one of these boats, whether it was their first voyage or their fifth had one thing in common, faith, and more often than not faith in something that they had no proof actually existed, faith in things that had never been seen. They didn't know what

a current looked like, but they trusted they would guide the waves. They didn't know what spices would be there when they arrived, if there would be any but they trusted there would be something. They didn't know if their family would be there waiting, but they trusted that they would be, that all would be well. They boarded these ships with nothing but faith that this huge piece of wood and the mental acuity of their skipper would guide them to where they needed to be. They had the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen, and I don't know how they did it.

We live in a world that demands nothing but proof, proper evidence that something is real, that something exists in the way that we expect it to. We have mapped the world, we can tell you how currents flow and where shorelines are. We have practically mapped the solar system so we know how stars move and where they will be. When we have a cold we can tell you what that virus looks like and how the medicines you ingest are going to work on your system to make it better. Who needs a map when you have GPS? Who needs to think or ponder when you can ask Google? When you can just plug what you need into AI and it will give you everything that you possibly need? We have built a world that functions solely and completely on what we can see, what we can hold, because then we know its real, we can poke and prod at it to make sure that its fool proof and find any cracks

that might cause us problems so we can take care of it before the problem even actually occurs.

And yet...here we are...here we sit...we are gathered here today because we trust and believe and hope in something we have no proof of. We cannot type into AI, hey Google does God exist? Is the resurrection real? Because the answer they give won't have definitive proof, and yet, *and yet*...here we are. We're here because people like Abram took God at God's word when God is like, yes, I will give you descendents as numerous as the stars. Abram was never going to live long enough to see the proof of that but he *believed*. We're here because people like Peter, like James, like John dropped their nets because they believed that fishing for people could be a thing and be something more fruitful than actual fishing. We're here on the legacy and foundation of people who over and over and over again said yes to God even when what they were saying yes to seemed impossible. And by showing up here and singing and saying amen, let it be so we continue to build on that foundation that says, this is who we are, this is what we trust, this is where our faith lies even if it cannot be proven with facts, figures, and theorems; even if it can't be charted on a map.

I think it's immensely telling that the one sentence said *the most* in scripture is "do not be afraid." It is the thing God says to God's people the

most often throughout the Bible and I think it's because God knows that we are going to have those moments where faith doesn't make sense, where we are going to want something firm to grasp hold of to say this is the thing I trust in, and when we don't have that we are going to feel like we are drowning, flailing our arms in a sea that never stops crashing waves over our heads, so God over and over and over again says, do not be afraid, a promise that no matter what assails us, God is going to be there, God is going to watch over us and keep us protected—maybe not in all the ways that we would define protected, but in the ways that matter. We will never be alone, unloved, or invisible, because God promises to be there, to show up, to remind us that we have no reason to fear.

And no, we're not always going to be able to *see* what we hope for in the complete sense. We can't see heaven, we can't see what happens in the resurrection, but...for our brains, our world that needs some sense of tangible, some help with the whole conviction of things not seen thing, God keeps doing what God does, God keeps showing up in the way we need God to. Take in a deep breath, let air fill your lungs and let it out slowly feeling your heartbeat slow with the movement—that is God, God in the miracle of oxygen and respiration. Place your hand over your heart, feel it beat—that is God, in the wonder and mystery of being human and having a body that just

knows what it is supposed to do. Look around this room, find the person that you know would hold your hand or give you a hug if you needed it—that is God, showing up in the miracle of community and relationship, when disparate, diverse people come together and say, I love you and I am committed to this faith thing with you. Think about the hard things that you had to walk this past week, and yet, you're still here—that is God in the power and perseverance of the promise that we do not walk the hard things alone. Every single day, every single minute there are moments of proof, moments that show us why we have this conviction of things not seen.

And it goes well beyond just our own bodies and lives. Think about the flowers that push up through concrete slabs, determinedly pursuing life and growth in the harshest of environments. Think about the wonder that we can cure diseases and find answers, in the legit miracle of medicine. Think about the chance encounter you had with someone at Wal-Mart or Kroger, the small smile, moving over so you can maneuver the aisle smoothly. Think about your pets if you have them, the unconditional, unabashed, crazy, stupid love they show us no matter how imperfect and flawed we are. Honestly, think about the resilience it takes to simply be a human being functioning in the world we are living in today, where we move from one unprecedented time to another in the blink of an eye. If every day you wake

up committed to love and grace and hope, that is a miracle and that is faith and that is God working in our hearts, because if it was up to us I think most of us wouldn't be getting out of bed in the morning.

Genesis tells us that it was Abraham's belief in the impossible that put him into right relationship with God, it was his conviction of things not seen that reckoned him righteous. We spend so much time fretting about doing the right, most perfect thing for God, making our faith all shiny and new and beautiful, and yet that's not what right relationship with God is about. Right relationship with God is showing up, getting out of bed in the morning, and saying, there is no reason this world should exist, but it does, there is no way I should be this beloved human, but I am, and then going out into the world and daring to live that way, daring to live knowing the impossible is possible and that God is going to show up in all the ways that we can't always see.

The good ship faith keeps moving ever forward, towards shores not always known, definitely not always seen, but with trust that the destination, the journey will be worth it, watched over and protected. We might not always have the map in front of us, but we have a guide, a guide who over and over says do not be afraid my little flock of sailors, all will be well and all will be well and all manner of things shall be well, if only you dare to believe in those things which lie beyond the horizon. **AMEN!!!**