



## **SURROUNDED BY A CLOUD OF WITNESSES**

Hebrews 12: 1-2      August 15, 2010

Pilgrim              Bud Precise

Cooperstown – home of Baseball Hall of Fame. There you will find the heroes of baseball. Ty Cobb, Babe Ruth, Ted Williams, Jackie Robinson, Roberto Clemente, Willie Mays, Hank Aaron – there is really a long list - and the latest inductee – Andre Dawson. Once a year, baseball gathers at Cooperstown to celebrate the heroes of the game and remember those who are baseball's best representatives.

If you were to read the 11<sup>th</sup> chapter of Hebrews, the chapter preceding our lectionary text for today, you would find a list of the heroes of the faith. Those people who stood tall in their living out the faith.

Maybe a word about faith is in order here.

A common thought among non-believers and believers alike is the notion that faith means believing something to be true when the evidence is not sufficient to establish knowledge. A probability of nine tenths is much better than three tenths. Faith is read in terms of intellectual content. The goal of knowledge is to increase the fractions of probability – making something more certain. Faith is never a substitute for knowledge, but faith is important to all knowledge. We are not going to reach a time when knowledge will replace faith. As knowledge grows, faith grows also. In the Bible, faith is not just something a person believes. Faith involves trust. That trust causes people to act in faith in response to the call of God upon their life. The writer of Hebrews makes some 18 references to people responding in faith.

Faith causes Abel to offer a sacrifice acceptable to God.

Faith led Noah to build an ark.

Faith caused Abraham and Sarai to wander in a foreign land.

Faith led Moses to confront the Pharaoh of Egypt and lead the Hebrew slaves through the sea to freedom.

There are the stories of the faith of Joshua, Rahab, Gideon, Sampson, David and the prophets.

The 11<sup>th</sup> chapter is like a roll call of the heroes of our faith.

Our text for today asks us to remember those heroes of our faith. The writer of Hebrews reminds us that we are surrounded by this great cloud of witnesses. We have done a lot of things in our lives because of the people who had faith in us. We did not want to let them down – this cloud of witnesses.



Could you make a list of your heroes of the faith today? Some of us have lived long enough that that list would be quite long.

One of the heroes on my list today would be Eileen Sanborn. I finished a Masters of Christian Education at SMU in 1970. The church had just produced these amazing printed curriculum resources for the local church to use in Sunday School. The program was floundering mightily because the teachers were not able to use these resources. Enter Eileen Sanborn. She created for the church all over the country training sessions for teachers. She name this training *Laboratory Schools*. Main ingredients – teachers, students, printed curriculum, a lab leader and this most helpful process. Eileen recruited me to be one of these lab leaders. I would go to a local church – or the lab usually included a cluster of churches. There was a 3-hour orientation. If you missed, don't show up. Attendance was mandatory for the whole lab session. No part time people. What followed the orientation was a series of sessions. The students – adult teachers, and high school age people, were there to help with planning and leading sessions. Each small group planned a lesson using the printed resources – and other resources they thought would help the session. Then they would teach the class. After the class there was an evaluation. Those planning went first, then anyone else could comment. The evaluation included looking at the teaching plan, what went well and what was not so good, or didn't go as they had planned. There was the question, what would you do differently? When evaluation was over, there was a break for the next planning team to set up and get ready to lead a session. This whole Laboratory School experience was built on planning – (adult and high school students together) teaching, evaluating. In included helping the adults learn about high school students. It included methods – what would teach this best? The shortest lab school was 16 hours, the longest 29.

Eileen Sanborn was committed to the teaching ministry of the church. She would stand up to District Superintendents, Bishops – anyone who tried to water down the Lab School process. She insisted what we were doing was God's work and it was to be done in a way that would help Sunday school teachers and students learn the Christian Faith. Her system lasted for 18 years. It ended because we couldn't find adult teachers of youth willing to invest that much time in teacher preparation. To me Eileen is a hero I remember. She cared enough, was committed enough to spend what ever time it took to have good adult teachers with our young people. I can point you today to leaders in the church – ministers, educators, chairpersons of committees – people who learned the story of the faith in Sunday school.



At the end of our text for today, the writer of Hebrews uses a metaphor for the faith as a race we are to run with perseverance. We are to put aside every weight, every sin that would hold us back.

Nothing is so disheartening as a lonely struggle – when no one else sees or cares. When there is no human friend to share the burden, life is hard. It is hard to be strong when we are alone. The writer of Hebrews today wants us to remember we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses. The heroes of Faith are still speaking – that is why they are witnesses.

Do you see the cloud of witnesses surrounding us today? Do you remember them, their words, their deeds, their dedication to the faith? Eileen Sanborn is one of those for me. As I think of Pilgrim, I think of Barbara Manning, Elaine Shealy, Jim Wiswall, Rod Nowakowski – members of Pilgrim who have died since I have been at Pilgrim. We still feel their presence. I could add to that list people who have been a part of us and have moved away to be a part of another congregation – Skip and Lou, Polly, Annie, Jack, the Bells, Trent, Barrett and Miriam.

This journey we are on has brought us far. Let us remember and give thanks to those who have - and still do – bless us on our race that we run with perseverance.

By faith, let us join that list of the People of God.