

April 28, 2002

Lincoln Berean Church 40th Anniversary
Message by Pastor Bryan Clark
April 28, 2002 - Pershing Auditorium

Have you ever noticed how willing people are to believe almost anything and anybody until it comes to God. And then people just kind of clutch.

Think of all the ways that you exercise your faith on a daily basis. When you go to the pharmacist you just believe by faith that he is giving you something you need, not something that will kill you.

When you leave today, if you stop at a restaurant, you believe by faith that piece of meat wasn't on the counter all night. If you have real faith, you'll stop at a fast food restaurant and believe by faith that burger hasn't spent time on the floor. And as a recovering germophobic, that's not easy. But we believe many things by faith.

Today thousands of people will watch the news or a news show and it will never even dawn on them that maybe what they're hearing isn't true. They'll just believe it by faith. But it goes beyond the news. There will be hundreds of thousands of people who will watch commercials and believe them. There's a reason why companies spend millions of dollars to advertise—it's because we believe what they tell us. So you watch a commercial about this machine called the Bowflex machine. And if you send in payments of this amount of money, they tell you that in 30 days, 20 minutes a day, 3 days a week, you can look like that. Well, I've got to tell you—20 hours a day, 30 years—this body "ain't never goin' to look like that." It's not true. And if you're not into that kind of exercise, then you can buy one of those things you put around your waist and all day long it shoots bolts of electricity into you, and it will sculpt you into the man or woman you've always wanted to be. You can tell the people who have believed that, because they kind of twitch around all day long—I think they're short-circuiting. And I just heard on the radio that now you don't even have to exercise and you don't even have to watch what you eat. You can just take a pill to be lean and healthy. Now, I would love for that to be true—but it's not.

What separates us today from the hundreds of thousands of people who are around us is that we have made a choice of our will to believe. We believe by faith in a God who has demonstrated His faithfulness for thousands of years. And because of that faith, our lives have been radically transformed. We are new creations in Christ.

So we gather here this morning as a community of faith. We have by faith believed that the Eternal God created the universe by His spoken word. We have believed by faith that we are sinners condemned to hell. We have believed by faith that when God's time was right, he sent His own Son to this earth, born of a virgin, who lived a perfect life and allowed Himself to be nailed on a cross in atonement for the sins of the world. We believe by faith that He was buried, and three days later He rose again and ascended to the Father. We believe that those who place their trust in Jesus Christ as Savior are radically changed. We become new creations; our sins are forgiven; and we have a relationship with God. We believe by faith that we are trophies of God's grace to the praise of His glory. We believe by faith that because of Jesus Christ we stand before Him righteous; we stand before Him forgiven; and that we will spend eternity with Him in heaven. All this we believe *by faith*.

But what about the next 10 years...the next 20 years...the next 40 years... if God would give us that long? Will we continue to be a people of faith? I believe that we will. The rewards of faith are great. If we had time this morning it would be wonderful to allow each of you to come up on stage and take the microphone and tell us how God has radically changed your life. How God has honored your faith and rewarded you in more ways that you can begin to even talk about.

We have been studying what it means to be a person of faith by looking at two “hall of famers”—Abraham and Sarah. Let’s look at Hebrews 11, which many refer to as the faith hall of fame, to see the highlights of Abraham and Sarah’s walk by faith.

Hebrews 11:1-16:

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the men of old gained approval. By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible.

By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous, God testifying about his gifts, and through faith, though he is dead, he still speaks.

By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death; and he was not found because God took him up; for he obtained the witness that before his being taken up he was pleasing to God. And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.

By faith Noah, being warned by God about things not yet seen, in reverence prepared an ark for the salvation of his household, by which he condemned the world, and became an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.

By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow-heirs of the same promise; for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

By faith even Sarah herself received ability to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life, since she considered Him faithful who had promised; therefore, also, there was born of one man, and him as good as dead at that, as many descendants as the stars of heaven in number, and innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore.

All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own. And indeed if they had been thinking of that country from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them.

Notice the comments that the writer of Hebrews 11 makes concerning Abraham and Sarah’s faith. Hebrews 11:1 is kind of a description of faith. And if we were to put it into language that we’ve been using, verse one would say, “faith means believing that God tells the truth, and living like it.” Then the writer goes on to talk about great heroes of faith down through history.

In verse 8 we pick up the story of Abraham. The writer highlights the fact that Abraham was called out of Ur of the Chaldeans to go to a land of promise. God didn’t tell him where he was going or how he was going to get there. Abraham just believed by faith.

It's an amazing thing to think he was comfortable in this land and understood his life, yet was willing to leave all that—to pack up and go to a place he didn't know. And God just said, "I'll tell you. I'll lead you. Just trust Me."

That has been the history of this church. As a matter of fact, it's a very familiar pattern in the Scriptures. God says, "I just want you to listen. I want you to obey. And I'll tell you along the way where you need to go." When the nation of Israel was crossing the Jordan River, it wasn't until they stepped in that God parted the waters. He said, "You step in... I'll part the waters. Take a step of faith."

This past week I was watching a full hour interview with Curt and Claudine Lehman. (We saw just about 8 minutes of it this morning.) It caught my attention over and over again in that video how many times God called them to just step out by faith. They didn't know where they were going. They didn't know how they were going to get there. They just were willing to be obedient to the call. In fact, there were a number of times when they stepped out by faith, when they were right in the middle of something and didn't have any idea how they were going to get out. And they got on their knees before God; and He was faithful time and time again.

Now it might be tempting for some of you to say, "That's just the way Curt Lehman is." Well, I've got a secret for you (don't tell him I said this; it's just kind of our little secret) but that isn't the way he is. Curt is a very organized, scheduled man—he likes his ducks in a row. As a matter of fact, one time I had the privilege of riding with the Lehman family to Montana. Montana is a long ways away. We had a wonderful time together, but I learned that Curt is a scheduled person. He had it documented when we would take our rest stops, when we would eat breakfast, where we would be by lunch. I mean, it was upsetting him because we were falling behind schedule. But when God called Curt, He didn't lay it all out. Time and time again in the church God didn't tell him, "This is how we're going to do it." He just said, "Go."

And in an act of obedience, time and time again the people of this church have stepped out and believed that God would be faithful. Sometimes God just says, "Go." It doesn't work in the budget, and we don't necessarily have a great strategy for it. We just walk by faith. That's what it means to be a people of faith.

The second thing highlighted in the Hebrews 11 passage is in verses 9 and 10, where we're reminded that Abraham and Isaac and Jacob lived in a tent. That's a way of saying they were unwilling to stop and settle and build, because they were looking for a city whose builder and architect was God. In other words, they would settle for nothing less than the land of promise that God offered. The reality is that to be a people of faith means that we don't settle for the things of this world. We don't settle for just what we can touch and feel and understand in this world. But we live for an eternal Kingdom and we take that by faith. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob all died believing. They never did see possession of that land, but they believed.

The writer goes on in verse 11 and highlights the faith of Sarah. Sarah, at age 90, believed that God would do a miracle that she couldn't do in her flesh—that He would give her a son, the son of promise. And God fulfilled that promise. It reminds us that God wants to do things that we cannot possibly accomplish in our flesh. Our vision has to be bigger than what we can strategize—bigger than what we can figure out or what we can budget. It has to

be bigger than what we ourselves can do. We have to believe individually and corporately that God wants to do a miracle through us. God wants to do things we couldn't possibly do apart from His great power. In other words, if God sleeps in tomorrow morning, we're all in trouble. That's the way He wants us to live our lives.

Finally, in verse 17 he talks about that great test when Abraham offered his son, Isaac, on that altar. He took what he loved most and he willingly gave it to God in the ultimate act of faith.

This church has been characterized by significant steps of faith—stepping out in obedience and living for the Kingdom of God—that which is eternal. This church has been willing to put whatever needs to be put on the altar, in order to build His Kingdom.

Do you realize that 20 years ago there were less than 500 people in this church? Do you realize that just 10 years ago there were less than 1200 people in this church? Now take a look around. God has honored our faith. Sometimes people say, “You're just about numbers.” So, I'll put it on the table: that's exactly what I'm about. I'm about numbers. I think about numbers when I go to bed at night. I think about numbers when I get up in the morning. I think about numbers all day long. That is the passion of my life and it will be until they lay me in the grave; because every number represents a living soul who will spend eternity somewhere. And that is the passion of my life—introducing people to God in an eternal relationship.

Just to illustrate that, in the last 10 years we've had to make a lot of changes. We've gone from two services to five services on a weekend. We've had to make changes in the staffing, the structure, parking—and the hassles that we all understand and have gone through. And sometimes it's easy to forget why we do that. So I want to remind you why we do that.

If you think the last 10 years have been about numbers, I'd like you to meet those numbers. I'd like every person who has started attending Lincoln Berean in the last 10 years to please stand. So ... there they are—there are the numbers! They are living, breathing people who will spend eternity somewhere. We have done the difficult things. We've made the hard choices. We've inconvenienced ourselves so that these people could be part of the family. Wouldn't you agree with me this morning it has been worth it?

Every time we talk about numbers and overcrowding, or we talk about changes we need to make, never forget we're talking about people. Some of those people were living in darkness and now they're living in light. Some were enemies of God and now they're children of God. Some were condemned to an eternal hell and now they're destined for eternal heaven. That's what we're about.

But what about 10 years from now? I would like to suggest to you that ten years from now we will not hold our reunion here at Pershing Auditorium, because we won't fit. I would expect a minimum of 9,000 people. If I say 9,000 people, what do you think of? Let me put it this way: if every person in this room over the next 10 years influenced just two people for Christ and brought them into the church, we'd be at 9,000 people. That's like a minimal standard, isn't it? Two people in 10 years. I think we can do that. In fact, I think the next reunion will be in some other building because we won't fit.

This past week I had Sue, my secretary, go through our church directory and list out all the different places where we penetrate vocationally in this community. Listen as I read this list:

We as a people of faith, a community of faith, are in the educational system. We have people of faith here in our universities as deans, professors, administrators, coaches, clerical workers and students. We have people of faith in preschools, elementary schools, middle schools, and high schools as principals, teachers, paraprofessionals, secretaries, athletic directors, coaches, mentors and students.

We have people of faith in law enforcement, such as the state patrol, county sheriffs, and city police. We have firefighters, EMT's and rescue workers, as well as people in various branches of the military.

We have people of faith here this morning who are in US government offices such as the Federal Aviation Administration, US Treasury and the US Postal Service.

We have people of faith here this morning in state offices such as the Dept. of Roads, Dept. of Labor, NE Supreme Court, Dept. of Revenue, Dept. of Education, Dept. of Health & Human Services, Dept. of Corrections, Dept. of Agriculture, State Penitentiary, Dept. of Economic Development, Board of Engineering, and Game and Parks.

We have people of faith in county and city offices such as the Assessor's office, Public Defense Office, Water Dept., Chamber of Commerce, Credit Bureau, Housing Authority.

We have people of faith here this morning who are attorneys, lobbyists, politicians and judges.

We have people of faith who are in radio, television, newspapers and magazines. They are writers, editors, reporters, announcers, advertisers, marketers, and employed in various computer fields.

We have people of faith here this morning who are campus missionaries, camp directors, and those who work with international radio ministry, inner-city and youth ministry, homeless shelters, charities and various types of mission work.

We have people of faith who are homemakers, day care providers, social workers, foster care providers, and those who are assisted living and long-term care providers.

We have people of faith here this morning who serve as doctors, hospital administrators, nurses, paramedics, chiropractors, physical therapists, technologists, pharmacists, home health care providers, dentists, technicians, funeral home directors, counselors, psychologists and massage therapists.

We have people of faith here who own small businesses, and those who are store managers and sales persons in almost every field possible.

We have people of faith here this morning who work as bank officers, tellers, financial planners, insurance agents, CPAs, and auditors.

We have people of faith here this morning who are factory and production workers, engineers, architects, draftsmen, secretaries, receptionists, contractors, lumber and

concrete workers, roofers, carpenters, cabinet makers, drywallers, excavators, painters, decorators, steelworkers, electricians, earth movers, and truck drivers.

We have people of faith who serve in the food industry as commercial food distributors, restaurant managers, chefs, servers, grocery store owners, clerks, fast food owners and workers.

We have people of faith here who are in fine arts, as artists, musicians, dancers, teachers, photographers, and painters.

We have people of faith who are airplane pilots, aircraft mechanics, airline inspectors, bus drivers, railroad workers, truck drivers, car sales people, auto body workers, mechanics, bicycle sales and repair people.

We have people of faith here this morning who are farmers, veterinarians, orchard and berry farm people, Coop personnel, nursery owners, horticulturalists, lawn care specialists, florists, and tree service workers.

We have people of faith here this morning who serve in areas such as dry cleaning, refuse, delivery services, employment agencies, real estate, commercial and residential cleaning, furniture design, heating and air conditioning, underground sprinklers, well drilling, and alarm systems. We have hair stylists, travel agents, greens keepers and professional baseball players.

When you think about the lost people living in darkness in our community, I want us to say, “They can run, baby...but they can’t hide!” We are like gnats in the city—we’re everywhere.

Have you ever stopped to think about the potential of this body of believers turning this city upside down—or right side up? There is no reason why we cannot. If a false religion such as Islam can take over entire countries, why can’t the Gospel of Jesus Christ take over a city? And why not us? Why not in our lifetime? Why not our generation? Why not through this body? And why not this city?

Think of all the people we have who work in the public school system...from students all the way through teachers, and everybody I mentioned. Why couldn’t those schools be turned around in such a way that every student who went through them received an adequate witness of the life-changing power of Jesus Christ? Why couldn’t it be that the peer pressure was more to be like Christ than to be otherwise?

We have two sections here today packed full of college students, and it doesn’t take much to light a fire under those students. Why isn’t it possible that they could so penetrate the campus that every student who comes through a four-year program at the University of Nebraska would encounter a significant influence of the Gospel of Jesus Christ? Why not? And why not this generation?

Why not this local body of believers radically changing this city, partnering with City Impact to where the inner-city is no longer a place of darkness, but a place of hope? Why not radically change the inner-city schools to be some of the finest schools in the state of Nebraska? Why couldn’t we as a body influence that change? Why couldn’t this church be a part of radically changing this community?

Let me throw out a challenge. Whenever you go somewhere, especially if it's out of state, and you tell someone that you're from Lincoln, Nebraska, what's the first thing they refer to when they think of Lincoln? Football! That's all we're on the map for. What if, through the faith of this body of believers, Jesus Christ trumped football? What if we went somewhere else in the United States and said we were from Lincoln, Nebraska—and they said, "I hear God's doing a work there!"

One of the struggles we have with our current facility is that we just see little segments of the congregation at once. And there's a tendency to think that's who we are. But that's not who we are—*this* is who we are. And there's no reason why this group of people can't penetrate and change our city.

One of the things we're going to have to address is building an auditorium. We can't continue to pack 9,000 people into the facility we have. And the first step to getting a multi-thousand seat auditorium is to pay off the debt. Right now we have a little less than 3.5 million dollars in debt. We need to pay that off; and all of us need to be willing to sacrifice to make that happen.

But the Bible also talks about a gift of giving. And I'm convinced in an audience (congregation) this size, that there are 12 people who have the ability to make \$250,000. Would you be willing to get on your knees and ask God; and if He were to provide \$250,000 through you or your business, would you give that to retire the debt? With 12 people, the debt would be gone, and we could start the next project. I think that's entirely possible, but we need to trust God by faith.

Are you willing to put up with the inconveniences, the challenges, and the changes that will be necessary in order to continue to grow? Not just to pack a room full of 9,000 people. But that every one of those people is shepherded. Every one of those people is cared for. Every one of those people is becoming complete in Christ.

We're committed as a staff to do what we need to do to make that happen. I believe you are committed to that. I believe that's been our history. And I believe that will be our future—so much so, that I believe that is why this morning we meet at Pershing, and not in the former Joseph's College of Beauty building. It's because of those great steps of faith taken by this church body.

And I believe the 50th Anniversary will not be held in Pershing Auditorium. I believe it will be held somewhere else, because we're willing to step out and trust God by faith. I don't know anything more near and dear to the heart of God than the mission of His church: to reach lost people and introduce them to the Savior, that they will become like Christ to the praise of His glory. I don't see any reason why God wouldn't be thrilled to answer this prayer if we have the courage to be a people of faith in the days ahead.