Desire a Better Country
Hebrews 11:1–3, 8–16

God, why?

A high school student who once participated in Haven UMC's music school is now in college. Back in high school, he wasn't that interested in faith. But once he got to college, he met friends who shared their faith with him, and now he's starting to ask questions—honest, important questions. One of them is this: *"If there's so much injustice in the world, why does God seem silent?"* That's a hard question. And maybe it's one we've all asked at some point.

Just last week at Zion UMC during fellowship time, someone asked a similar question. We were talking about the war in Gaza. So many innocent people have died. Millions are facing starvation. And yet American political leaders continue sending weapons to Israel, driven more by their own interests than peace. A church member looked at me and asked, *"Why does God let the world stay like this?"* When injustice fills the world, how can we not cry out: *"God, why are you silent?"*

When Your Heart Feels Heavy

What do you do when your heart is heavy like that? Many Christians have what I'd call a "good person complex." We feel like we shouldn't get angry or complain. So we bottle up the hurt and carry it around like a sickness. But Scripture doesn't teach us to suppress our emotions. Instead, it gives us language to lift them up to God—especially in the Psalms.

One of our church members recently sent me a video. It showed the inhumane treatment of immigrants in the U.S.—people being arrested without a warrant, detained without access to lawyers or visits from family. In Florida, there's now a detention center for immigrants in the Everglades—where alligators and mosquitoes swarm. Officials joke that if people try to escape, they'll have to survive the alligators first. It's cruel. And sadly, it's becoming normal.

I felt so heartbroken and angry watching that video. So I told that church member: *"These days, I keep praying Psalm 58."* Let me read parts of that psalm from The Message translation. It's a psalm of lament—honest, raw, even uncomfortable:

Psalm 58 (selected verses)

1-2 Is this any way to run a country? Is there an honest politician in the house? Behind the scenes
you weave webs of deceit, behind closed doors you make deals with demons.
3-5 The wicked crawl from the wrong side of the cradle; their first words out of the womb are
lies. Poison, lethal rattlesnake poison, drips from their forked tongues…
6-9 God, smash their teeth to bits, leave them toothless tigers.
Let their lives be buckets of water spilled, all that's left, a damp stain in the sand.
Let them be trampled grass worn smooth by the traffic.
Let them dissolve into snail slime, be a miscarried fetus that never sees sunlight.
Before what they cook up is half-done, God,
throw it out with the garbage!

This is the word of God for the people of God. (Yes—even this!) Now, how does that make you feel? Maybe just hearing it helps you breathe a little easier. Friends, when we feel powerless in the face of injustice, when it's hard to speak or act, remember Psalm 58. Let

yourself be honest with God. You can bring your anger and disappointment to God in prayer. Because we believe God is just. And we believe God's reign will come.

Faith Is the Substance of Things Hoped For…

But let's be honest—when we look at the world, it's hard to hold on to that faith. The war in Ukraine is still ongoing, now in its third year. The war in Gaza has brought unthinkable loss and hunger. In Korea, this year marks 80 years since liberation—and also 80 years of division between North and South. For eight decades, people have prayed for peace and reunification, but it still feels so far off.

`When hope feels distant, it's easy to grow weary, even cynical. And that's dangerous—because a faith without hope begins to wither. The early Christians who first received the Letter to Hebrews knew that feeling too. At first, they endured persecution with strength—believing that Christ would return soon. But as time went on and nothing seemed to change, people began to wonder: *"Is Jesus really coming back?"* Their hope started to fade. Some stopped gathering with the community. Others drifted away from their faith.

But the writer of Hebrews reminds them—and us—that what we need most in those moments is not a clear sign or visible proof. What we need is **faith**. "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." (Heb. 11:1) Faith isn't just a feeling in your heart. It's not just saying *"I believe."* Faith is a **way of living**—a commitment to move toward the promise, even when we don't see it yet.

Living by Faith Toward a Better Country

Think about Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and those who led the civil rights movement in the 1950s and 60s. Do you think there were signs that racial equality was coming? No. Peaceful protestors were beaten and jailed. Black churches were bombed. Threats were constant. Many white Christians stayed silent.

There were no signs that change was coming. Still, they marched. Still, they hoped. They believed in a vision they couldn't yet see. They hoped for a world where people would not be judged by the color of their skin. They dreamed of a better country. They desire a better country! And because they believed in that promise, they found the courage to act—even when the odds were against them.

This is exactly what the writer of Hebrews is saying: when your situation doesn't seem to improve, when justice feels out of reach, it is **faith** that keeps you moving. Even when we don't see change right away, faith helps us hold on. It keeps us praying. It keeps us walking toward God's reign on earth. Not all of us will change the world in big, visible ways. But each of us, through our faith, can send out small ripples of hope. And those ripples can become waves.

Step by Step Toward the Promise

Hebrews 11 tells us that Abraham obeyed God's call and left everything behind—even though he didn't know where he was going. He lived like a stranger in a foreign land. Did Abraham live long enough to see all of God's promises fulfilled? No. But he saw the promise from a distance and welcomed it. He kept going because he was longing for something more—for a better country.

So what does it mean for us to long for that better country—the kingdom of God? It doesn't have to be dramatic. It starts small. Right now, we're collecting shoes for children heading back to school. Imagine how a child feels when they receive a brand-new pair of shoes

that actually fit—something they can be proud to wear. In that moment, even in a small way, joy breaks in. The kingdom of God draws near.

Is it possible to end hunger or poverty in our lifetime? Maybe not. But if we believe that God's justice is real, then we take one step. We join other churches in Warwick to donate 1,800 boxes of cereal to a local food pantry. Will that solve poverty? No. But it's a first step. A small act of love. A signpost of the better country we're walking toward.

How Do We Keep Going? One Step at a Time.

As many of you know, Juhee and I went backpacking in the White Mountains during our vacation. It took us six hours to climb to a ridge, and from there we could see the whole mountain range stretched out in front of us. I thought to myself, *"Can we really walk all that way with these heavy packs?"* But on the final day, as we stood on Mount Plume and looked back, we could see the 30 miles we had hiked. How did we do it? One step at a time. There were steep climbs, moments we were out of breath, and views that took our breath away. But most of the time, we just focused on the next step in front of us. And that's how we finished 33 miles in three days. With small faithful steps!

What Now?

So how do we build a better world? We keep walking. One faithful step at a time. We walk the path Christ has already made for us. We don't walk alone. The saints before us are cheering us on. Our community walks with us. So if you've felt discouraged… If you've lowered your eyes in despair… If you've thought, *"Nothing's ever going to change…"*

Lift your head again. Let's fix our eyes on the promise. Let's walk by faith—not by sight. Let's desire a better country—and live like it's already breaking in. Let's walk by faith, one step at a time, until justice rolls down like waters. Amen.