

Hebrews = HEE-brooz

A didactic reading infused with exhortation and poetic persuasiveness.

The reading is organized by the repetition of "by faith"; use its repetition to structure your proclamation.

Even emphasis on of "All these died" and "faith."

"Therefore" suggests the argument is coming to its conclusion. However, it's not.

This final use of "by faith" signals the conclusion of this argument, returning to the example of Abraham.

READING II Hebrews 11.1-2, 8-19

A reading from the Letter to the Hebrews.

[**Brothers and sisters:**

Faith is the assurance of things **hoped for**,
the **conviction** of things **not seen**.
Indeed, by **faith** our **ancestors** received **approval**.
By **faith** Abraham obeyed
when he was called to set out for a **place**
that he was to **receive** as an **inheritance**;
and he set out, not knowing where he was going.
By **faith** he stayed for a time
in the **land** he had been **promised**,
as in a **foreign land**, living in **tents**,
as did **Isaac** and **Jacob**,
who were **heirs** with him of the same **promise**.
For Abraham looked forward to the city that has **foundations**,
whose **architect** and **builder** is **God**.
By **faith** Sarah herself, though barren,
received **power to conceive**, even when she was **too old**,
because she considered him **faithful** who had **promised**. >>

Therefore from **one person**,
and this one as **good as dead**,
descendants were born,
"as **many** as the **stars of heaven**
and as the **innumerable grains of sand by the seashore**."] **All of these died in faith**
without having **received the promises**,
but from a **distance** they saw and **greeted** them.
They **confessed** that they were **strangers and foreigners**
on the earth,
for **people** who speak in this way
make it **clear** that they are seeking a **homeland**.
If they had been **thinking** of the land that they had left behind,
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**,
indeed, he has prepared a **city** for them.
By **faith** Abraham, when **put to the test**, offered up **Isaac**.
He who had received the **promises**
was ready to offer up his **only-begotten son**,
of **whom** he had been told,
"It is through **Isaac** that **descendants** shall be named for you."
Abraham considered the fact
that **God** is able even to raise someone from the **dead**—
and figuratively speaking, he **did** receive **Isaac** back.

[Shorter: Hebrews 11.1-2, 8-12 (see brackets)]

READING II

This passage defines faith as the realization of what is hoped for and the evidence of things that, though unseen, are nevertheless real—like God’s dynamic presence in the human realm (Hebrews 11.6). The author cites creation as

an example of “conviction of things not seen.” He explains that by faith we understand that the *visible* universe was ordered by the word of the invisible yet real God (Hebrews 11.3).

Abraham and Sarah are examples par excellence of people who live by faith. Abraham trusted God’s word that he would have countless descendants and receive a heavenly inheritance—things that only God could give. At God’s command, he left his homeland and lived the rest of his life as a resident alien in a strange land. (In

Canada he would have a Permanent Resident card.) Circumstances could have eroded Abraham’s and Sarah’s faith and convinced them either to return home or to fit into the culture around them. They, however, chose not to look back and trusted that God would give them a family. Because of their deep faith, God is “not ashamed” to be called their God. What a tribute!

The challenges to the couple’s faith seemed endless. Their childbearing years pass by, and still they have no son. And then, when at long last Isaac came forth

from Abraham, who was “as good as dead,” God further tests his faith by asking him to give Isaac back. By this time, however, Abraham trusts that God will in some unexpected and unimaginable way be faithful, that God can raise his son from the dead. The author of Hebrews interprets God’s sparing of Isaac as a symbol of the Resurrection of Christ, the act that makes the ultimate fulfillment of all divine promises possible—for those who believe.