

“Remembering as Resistance”

Hebrews 11:1–2; 12:1–2a - Rev. Adam Hange, Hillsboro UCC – October 26, 2025

Introduction: Resistance is Biblical

Over the past weeks, we’ve been talking about how *resistance is biblical*. As we bring this series to a close this morning, I want to take one more step into that theme—and talk about ***remembering as an act of resistance***...and consider how holding onto faith, is itself, an act of resistance in the face of fear, despair, and injustice.

Part I: The Hall of Faith — Memory as Sacred Defiance

Hebrews 11 is sometimes called the “Hall of Fame of Faith.”

But it’s more than a list of heroes — it’s a litany of holy defiance.

“By faith,” says the writer, “Abraham set out, not knowing where he was going.”

“By faith, Moses refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter.”

“By faith, Rahab the prostitute welcomed the spies and became part of God’s story of liberation.”

Each of these names, each short phrase, is a story of resistance — a refusal to be defined by fear, or empire, or despair.

These were not people who had all the answers. At least, not in their own time...

They were people who *trusted* God enough to step into the unknown.

To remember them is not simply to admire them. It’s to locate ourselves within that same ongoing story — the story of a people who have always resisted

domination and despair, who have always dared to imagine that God is not finished yet, and there is STILL reason for hope.

Faith, in this sense, is not primarily belief; it's *movement*. It's action grounded in trust. It's the willingness to say, "I will walk forward, even when I can't see the path."

Trusting that the One who holds me... is, and will always be... faithful!

And it's no coincidence that the writer of Hebrews names so many who suffered, who lost, who waited.

This sermon builds to a climax with a point - a message for those early church believers, who may be discouraged, or afraid, during a season of persecution and oppression.

The message is this:

Faith does not protect us from struggle. Faith gives us the courage to remain human *in the midst*

That's what it means when the writer turns the corner in chapter 12 and says,

"Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses,

let us run with perseverance the race set before us."

We are surrounded — not alone... By a great cloud of witnesses, that stretches beyond even this list, to modern day prophets and reformers.

Their memory strengthens us. Their witness still whispers to our spirits: ***Do not give up. Keep running. Keep resisting. Keep remembering who you are.***

And that's the first act of resistance — to remember. *Because empires thrive on amnesia.*

They depend on us forgetting who we are, forgetting who God is, forgetting the stories that make us strong.

To remember is to resist the powers that tear down, erase, distort, and divide.

To remember is to re-member — literally, means to put the body back together, to join our stories with those who came before and those who are yet to come.

Part II: From Wittenberg to Washington — The Reformation Then and Now

More than fifteen hundred years after those first faithful wanderers, a young monk named Martin Luther looked around at the church he loved and saw something was deeply wrong.

The Church had become entangled with empire and money. Bishops were selling indulgences — promises of forgiveness... for a price. The Pope was funding the building of grand cathedrals with the coins of the poor. Scripture was locked away in Latin, inaccessible to the people who hungered for truth.

It wasn't only financial corruption. It was theological corruption — the distortion of God's grace into a system of fear and control.

The Church that was supposed to set people free... had become a gatekeeper.

So Luther took up his hammer, and famously nailed 95 theses to the church door in Wittenberg, and called for repentance — not from the peasants, *but from the powerful*.

He wasn't trying to start a new church. He was trying to *call the Church back to its true self*, to the radical center of the gospel:

that salvation is not for sale, that grace is not earned, that God's mercy cannot be controlled by any institution. And Christ alone - not a pope, not a king - is worthy of the title: Lord of all.

And though he could never have imagined it, the sound of that hammer on wood reverberated through history. Through the tools of the age - pamphlets and comics - this message went viral.

The Reformation was born not out of hatred of the Church, but out of love for it — a love fierce enough to tell the truth.

A love rooted in the hope and faith, that something better was possible.

When we look around at our own time, it's not hard to see the parallels.

Then, indulgences were sold to fund the Church's power; **now**, influence and favor are bought and sold in politics - Lobbyists and billionaires purchase access, while the poor are told to tighten their belts.

The moral economy has been inverted — grace for the rich, judgment for the poor and marginalized.

Then, church leaders controlled the message by keeping Scripture locked away; **now**, politicians and media corporations manipulate “truth” itself, flooding the public square with mis-information and disinformation. We are told to believe whatever benefits the powerful.

Then, the printing press became a tool of liberation — democratizing knowledge. **Now**, the internet holds that same potential, though it too can be so easily corrupted by greed, fear, and algorithms designed to divide.

In both eras, *fear* is the fuel of corruption. Fear of hell, fear of the other, fear of losing control.

The antidote is faith — not blind faith, but courageous trust that hope, love, and truth will prevail.

Like the Reformers, we are called to protest when power becomes self-serving.

We are called to say “no” to systems that exploit, dehumanize, and lie. That's not rebellion or insurrection; that's the beginning of repentance.

It's not cynicism; it's hope refusing to be silent.

And the parallels don't end there.

Just as Luther was not alone — he was joined by women and men who risked everything for the truth — so too our time has its reformers and prophets.

Journalists who uncover injustice. Activists who march for voting rights or climate justice. Whistleblowers who tell the truth when lies are more profitable.

Their courage echoes Luther's words: "Here I stand. I can do no other."

AND, we must be honest: the Reformation was not pure. It carried its own sins — of antisemitism, of sexism, of division.

And so remembering rightly also means repenting rightly. The Reformation reminds us that every reform movement, no matter how holy, must continue to reform itself.

Ecclesia semper reformanda est — the Church must always be reformed.

We might say the same for democracy. For our civic life. For the soul of our nation.

To remember the Reformation is not to glorify the past, but to learn from it — to see that God's Spirit keeps calling for renewal, again and again, wherever power becomes corrupt and truth is bent to serve it.

That same Spirit whispers now: remember, the work of reformation.. is not done.

Part III: Becoming the Ancestors the Future Will Need

Hebrews 11 ends on a striking note:

"All these died in faith without having received what was promised... yet they looked forward to a better country, that is, a heavenly one."

They didn't live to see the fulfillment — but they lived *toward* it.

That's faith. That's resistance. To live toward the promise even when you cannot yet see it.

The arc of the moral univers is long, but (remember!) ... it bends ***towards*** justice...

The sermon comes to its summit...

"Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses..."

We are not only heirs of their faith; we are its continuation.

Our lives are the next chapter in the story.

We are the ones future generations will remember — or forget.

That realization should both humble and embolden us.

Because memory is not only backward-looking; it's forward-forming. The way we live now becomes the memory others inherit.

We are someone's future ancestors. ***So what kind of ancestors do we want to be?***

When our descendants look back on this moment — an age of inequality, environmental crisis, political corruption, and despair — what will they say about us?

Will they say we kept the faith — that we resisted apathy, that we told the truth even when it cost us something, that we built communities of love in a time of division?

Or will they say we were too tired, too distracted, too afraid?

I hope they will say: “They remembered who they were.”

“They reformed what had become broken.”

“They believed in the power of love more than the love of power.”

That’s what it means to be part of this living reformation.

Because the Reformation was never only about doctrine — it was about liberation.

It was about freeing the gospel from control, freeing people from fear, freeing truth from silence.

And in our time, that liberation looks like resisting systems that dehumanize, standing with those who are targeted, and reimagining church as a place of radical welcome and truth-telling.

When we march for justice, when we feed the hungry, when we plant gardens of hope in a world of scarcity, when we choose compassion over cynicism — we are continuing the work of Hebrews 11. *We are remembering as resistance.*

We are also reforming the reformers — expanding the cloud of witnesses to include all those who were left out: the women who preached without pulpits, the enslaved who prayed for freedom, the immigrants who prayed and sang songs in languages the powerful did not understand.

Their faith, too, is part of our lineage. Their stories, too, are ours to remember.

To remember them is to resist every narrative that says faith is private, apolitical, or safe.

Because the faith that Hebrews and Luther both speak of is not safe. It’s transformative.

It’s the kind of faith that upends tables, challenges kings, and sets captives free.

So let us not be content to admire the reformers or quote the prophets. Let us *become* them — in our neighborhoods, our schools, our workplaces, our civic life.

Let us become the ones we've been waiting for — the next generation of faithful resisters, joyful reformers, and compassionate builders of the Beloved Community.

And when future generations remember us, may they say:

“By faith, they resisted despair.”

“By faith, they told the truth.”

“By faith, they reimagined the church.”

“By faith, they loved.”

May it be so!