

# 1.28.2024 Sermon

## Terra Fidem | Hebrews 11:5

### **SUMMARY KEYWORDS**

enoch, god, walking, word, faith, years, scripture, lived, hebrews, life, adam, verse, translated, terra firma, genesis, died, moving, methuselah, listed, heard

### **SPEAKERS**

Elder Kevin Brisbin

What a beautiful morning already. I am so glad you're all here. Thanks for gifting us with everything you're giving us this morning - your time, your presence, and for many of you even your vulnerability. I mean, that's a difficult thing to ask. And I just want you to know that we as a church don't take any of those offerings lightly. We respect and value all of those. And I pray that as a church, we would always be faithful to everything with which you entrust us. This church is a unique gift.

And it's been a unique gift to myself and to my family for just about 20 years now. Someone this morning, Jim, asked me how long I have been here and I said, wow, it will be 20 years this year. And or just last fall for me. But at any rate, I wanted to share a little bit about how my family came to be here. So, Erica and I were married in June of 2004. Fast forward three months, and then the early hours of September 2 2004, Erica had a dream.

She started me from sleep and shared the dream. And we believe that it was a prophetic dream, calling us to move to West Chester. Those were the words and our theology at that time. And we believe this so strongly that we gave our two week's notice at our jobs that morning, like, hours after the dream, like we went in that morning, we gave our two weeks' notice. And we moved to Westchester 14 days later, like the day after our 14 day's notice we moved here the next morning. And in the years that have followed, I have come to term this day, September 16. Our leap aversary And I commemorated every year like the year we took this leap of faith.

And I reflect on that journey and our journey. You know, since then, each year, every year on that day, and one such a year five years ago, I was writing my annual reflection just stream of consciousness as fast as my little fingers could type, which is fairly fast. I am in Enneagram three. But the words were flowing out of my fingertips when a new phrase poured out that I'd never thought or heard before. I've Googled it since but I haven't found any reference to it. So,

I think I may have created it in so much as any word or phrase can be created or novel. So, have I piqued your interest? Good. Well put a pin in that but I promise I'll come back before we're done.

For now, let's dig into today's text. We're in Hebrews 11. And as you've probably heard, well, as you've heard from every single preacher, so far, all three of my predecessors, as I am week four in this new series.

It's a hard knock life out in these Hebrews 11 Street's settle in, shift that weight, lean back, get comfortable in your chair, take a deep resetting breath. And here we go. One verse. But don't worry, your high context boy got this.

In fact, he was born for this. Hebrews 11 Five, by faith. Yes, we're only two words in and we're stopping already. I told you, I got this.

Every section in this chapter starts with this phrase, by faith. So, by faith blank, blank, and then there's a little bit more than by faith Blank, blank. And then there's a little more and by faith blank, blank, and there's a little more. But the author is using this phrase to frame this whole chapter.

So, the Greek word used here is *Christos*. And yes, that's a Greek word to a Hebrew audience. Some believe the letter may have originally been written in Hebrew, since it was written to the Hebrews and later translated into Greek. But our scriptures that we have today were translated from the Greek and framed around this Greek word. So that is the word I give you this this means persuasion credence moral conviction. It's the noun form of the root word *peitho*, which is a verb meaning to persuade, induce, one to believe convince. So *peistas* being the noun form means the persuaded or the convinced the believing the faith. See, it's a noun. So, it's the substance of things hoped for. It's the evidence of things not seen. The person place thing and idea *peistis* it appears 243 times and 227 verses across the New Testament, and 24 of those are in this chapter of Hebrew alone. That's one in every 10 usages just in this chapter of Hebrews.

So, continuing on by faith, you Enoch...

Enoch, our man of the hour, Enoch means dedicated in both Greek and in Hebrew. And we'll see if he lives up to it. Or perhaps if perhaps, maybe he personified this idea so much that it became the meaning of that word, because of him, what we'll see.

So, by faith Enoch was taken. And this isn't actually the best translation of this word, but it but it may have been part of a like a more idiomatic saying, or a cultural understanding because the word that's used here is metathéto, and metathéto more closely means to transpose.

So as a musician, when I hear the word transpose, I think of you know, to change keys, but more generally, it just means to switch the position of two things. So, it also means to transfer or even to translate. And I really liked that that translation too. And in fact, the King James version of this verse uses that translation of the word, see what it did there. Were in the verse actually reads as by faith, Enoch was translated, that he should not see death, and was not found, because God had translated him. for before his translation, he had this testimony that he pleased God.

But you can see that isn't quite as clear to our modern eyes and ears. So, it is translated for us as was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death. And all of those words are pretty straightforward. He could not be it goes on, he could not be found because God had taken him away. And that's a direct quote from Genesis 5:24. And it ends with for before he was taken up or translated, he was commended as one who pleased God.

He obtained the witness, if you're familiar with the word martyr, meaning witness that word is in our motto, as one who you will never gonna get this one. You are stressed. You are esteem, oh, theists, I struggled with this, and I wrote it out 10 different ways and none of them helped. It's up there, that one pleased God, which he did. And like last week, the author does not a laborer elaborate on why or how Enoch, please God simply states that he did.

And that's all we get. That's Hebrews 11, verse five.

But what else do we know about Enoch?

We also have Genesis chapter five, verses 21 to 24. And I'm going to start with just a brief synopsis in Genesis five is in general, if Hebrews is the by faith chapter, Genesis five would be the and he died chapter.

So, we have lots of these altogether. Adam lived a total of 930 years, and then he died altogether. So, if lived a total of 912 years, and then he died altogether. Enoch lived a total of 905 years, and then he died. Altogether. Kenyan lived a total of 910 years, and then you guessed it, he died altogether. Mahalo. Lived a total of 895 years, and then he died altogether. Jared lived a total of 962 years, and then he died. And then something unexpected happened in the seventh generation of Adam picking back up in that verse 21, we get when Enoch had lived 65 years, he became the father of Methuselah. After he became the father of Methuselah, Enoch walked faithfully with God 300 years and had other sons and daughters. Altogether. Enoch lived a total of 365 years.

But wait, and Enoch walked faithfully with God. And then he was no more because God took them away.

And not a single word more said about that either. That's it. Do you know how many people recorded in the Bible are not dying? And just going to heaven? I'm only aware of two.

Yeah, yeah. Enoch and Elijah. That's it. And we get all kinds of details on Elijah, all kinds of stories about Elijah, but this is all we get on Enoch. This is it.

I did however, discover something personally in this look at Genesis five that I felt exposed one of my 21st century biases a bit. And I think it's healthy and helpful to identify those things and be mindful of them. Because I do believe we bring ourselves and our experience to our reading of Scripture.

I think that's innately human and I don't think there's anything wrong with that. I think that's a natural practice. Because we're invited into relationship with God. And reading and relating to the Scriptures can be one meaningful way of experiencing relationship with God.

But I also believe it can be helpful to acknowledge this because it can acknowledge the general reality of Scripture being sifted through human experience. And in a way that I believe is not all that unique from the way it was sifted through experiences and perspectives and biases of the many different writers of Scripture and then was sifted through their different and diverse audiences. And this is not dissimilar to how Jesus himself became the word incarnate, embodied human, he had experiences. And this is how I like to imagine our interactions with scripture can be, like spending time with the Living Word themselves.

And so, my discovery, my bias, the average life expectancy in the United States in 2024, is 79.9 years. So, our perception of life in generations is informed and biased by this reality that we have. And we've all experienced this in the passing of great grandparents and grandparents, and for some of us, even parents. So even though we read, Adam lived a total of 930 years, and then he died. We don't have that context. It's not really part of our context. And here's my point. Look at this graphic that lists these generations of add on that we just read on a timeline.

Would you be surprised to learn that Enoch was not dead, but was translated only 57 years after Adam died?

Like this genealogy dating back to Adam, Enoch is the seventh generation from Adam, but the second patriarch whose life on this earth ended, second only to Adam himself. And 55 years before Adam son Seth died.

And I just find that realization, interesting. I've read these genealogies since I was a kid, and I've never made this particular connection before. And I highlight that simply to help us ask these types of questions. In what other ways do we bring our 21st sensibilities, 21st century sensibilities to Scripture, our post enlightenment understanding of understanding or our age of reason, expectations? And that's a question that may have scared me a few years ago if I'm honest, but I no longer view curiosity as an affront to faith or to trust or to truth. Rather, I view the truth as having nothing to fear but precisely that fear itself. And I see the scriptures actually inviting us to ask, seek, knock.

Now moving beyond Genesis, which gives us as much as any source does, I'll be at not much. We also have these few references to Enoch. So, since there are so few and they're so limited, I'm just going to give them to you all, it will take like 30 seconds. First Chronicles one three, which only lists his name and it listed as he Enoch with an age but he knocked Methuselah lame duck, and then jumping centuries forward.

Again, we have a reference in Luke chapter 337, actually referenced this in my last sermon during Advent, again, limited to a name and a genealogy with this time as Enoch again with an E Luke 337, which was the son of Methuselah, which was the son of Enoch, which was the son of Jared, then we get our Hebrew verse, and then the most controversial reference of all, in Jude, which has no chapters because it's just one, but in verses 14 and 15, where we get an Enoch also the seven from Adam, prophesied of these saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with 10,000 of his saints, to execute judgment on them all, goes on, and to convince all that are, are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and if all their hearts speeches with ungodly sinners have spoken against him. He thinks Jude and Enoch may have been feeling a bit of a way here.

But tone aside, there's no new content about Enoch, just this prophesy prophecy attributed to Enoch. And this is also a direct quote from the book of Enoch, which you may or may not have heard of. And as I mentioned, Jude is not a long book. It's one chapter, it's 25 Total verses. And this quote from the book of Enoch is 10% of the total words used in the entire Jude's entire epistle.

Now the Book of Enoch is a pseudo epigraphical I'm gonna get these words man pseudo meaning false and epigraph meaning inscription or name, so basically meaning false or questionable title. The Book of Enoch is believed to have originally been accepted by the Christian Church, as evidenced by its presence in the Dead Sea Scrolls, but was obviously

later excluded from the biblical canon because you will not find it in our Bible. It falls in the pseudepigrapha category because it is titled as if it was written by Enoch seventh generation from Adam, but has been largely questioned because it's believed to have been written in the third century BCE, obviously much, much later. And yet Jude includes it as accepted reference material and doubles down on his belief that this was written by the one in the same Enoch seventh generation from Adam. But I'm not here to debate the provenance of the epigraphical works, nor am I here to translate and study the largely apocryphal content of the book of Enoch. I'm here because the unknown author of Hebrews was compelled to include Enoch, in his or her, probably him, but we don't know, Hall of Faith.

And do you know how many heroes are cited in this by faith format in Hebrews 11? It's 1010 inductees, if you will. And remember, we are taking this sermon series to look back at them to observe how these men and women. Yes, there are two women that made this list of 10 20% representation.

Look forward in truth and in faith so that we too can learn how to look forward in faith, and in so doing inform the way we live now in the present. And of these 10 men and women. Second in this author's list is Enoch. And why I mean, if you're only going to list 10 people, would Enoch really have made the cut? Would he really have been one of the top 10 people to come to your mind? Well, for this author, it becomes clearer as we continue to journey through this chapter, it will become clear as we continue to journey together through it, that heaven is the ultimate hope for this author. And faith is the means by which we arrived there. So, using that rubric, it becomes a little clearer why this author would choose a man whose entire life is encapsulated as an Enoch walked faithfully with God. And then he was no more because God took him away. If this is their foundational goal, be faithful, avoid death, walk faithfully get to heaven. From that paradigm, it's no wonder he was selected as an inaugural inducted into the Hall of Faith. And that's how I believe the author of Hebrews would answer that question why Enoch?

But now for my answer.

Why Enoch?

Well, I appreciate Enoch's presence here, because amid all the examples that come before and after, and the one right before it last week, Sandra preached was of Abel, and here it says he's listed because he's an example of right sacrifice.

And then the one that immediately follows Enoch, that we're gonna get to in two weeks is Noah, and it's listed that he's included because by faith, of obedience by holy fear, he is included as in this, that sandwiched between these two between sacrifice and obedience through holy fear. We have Enoch, who is listed simply because of relational intimacy.

We've read all the scriptures on him, we don't get anything more.

It all comes down to he's here in this list, because he walked with God.

It's literally the only thing we do know about him. He walked with God. He walked with God here on Earth, and then that just translated to him walking with God in heaven.

We don't have any other acts of faith to go on. We don't see any sacrifices made by Enoch, we don't read any great acts of obedience of the likes that would require faith like building an ark for a flood before it may have ever rained or having a child and old age or being willing to sacrifice that long awaited child. All we see all we read his he walked faithfully with God, relational intimacy. And when we look back in order to observe how Enoch looked forward in faith, we see he walked with God, and I just love that.

And that got me to thinking, where else do we see God walking in Genesis?

It like immediately came to my mind as I was thinking about this idea of walking with God. It's right there just two chapters earlier in Genesis three in the account of the fall, even there, after the fall, they heard the sound of God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day.

Do you remember that?

And this is evidence that the fall didn't stop God from walking with Adam and Eve.

Their shame stopped Adam and Eve from walking with God.

Let me say that again. Because this wreck to me I hadn't quite realized this either too I was studying a new this this time.

The Fall didn't stop God from walking with Adam and Eve. Ver shame stopped Adam and Eve from joining God on their walk.

They eat of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil desiring to possess its knowledge within themselves rather than possessing it through their relationship with God, which they already had. And yet God still showed up for their evening walk. They hide. And he asks, "Where are you?"

He doesn't ask, "What have you done?"

He doesn't shout, show yourselves. He asks, "Where are you?"

And even when they say We heard you walking in the garden, which means I'm an eve knew the sound of God walking in the garden, they recognized it. I believe they recognize the sound of God walking in the cool of the garden, the garden in the cool of the day, because they were familiar with it. Maybe it was a daily ritual. Maybe they all like long walks on the beach in the Garden of Eden, that sunset and the cool of the day.

But when asked where they were they answer we heard you walking in the garden and we hid because we are we're naked. And even then God's next question is really telling.

He says, "Who told you were naked?"

And if we think about that, which again, I hadn't done. Who do we observe telling them that they were naked?

They did.

They realized they were naked, not the serpent. They were their own accusers, according to the scriptures here.

And if that doesn't preach, I'm not sure what will. When we fail, God doesn't stop walking with us. The temptation is for us to stop walking with God. And even then, God pursues us asking, "Where are you?" From our hiding spots behind the trees we say we're ashamed, naked. And like Adam and Eve, how often are we the ones shaming ourselves, reciting these narratives of unworthiness? Yet God, through personal sacrifice, covers our nakedness, removing our own perceptions of personal shame. Why?

Because God still desires us to walk with them. They (God) never stopped walking with us, even in life after Eden.

Listen to this. It says with the help of the Lord Eve said, I have brought forth a man. God continued to walk with her.

And last Sunday, Reverend Sandra went on to share in great length and in a phenomenal message - like if you haven't heard it, you have to seek it out on Facebook, YouTube, our website, it's everywhere find it somewhere. It's a very moving message that among many other things also demonstrated that God never stopped walking with Cain.

Not when Cain was angry, not even after Cain had murdered Abel. Even then, God pursued him.



Can we start to see, God will never stop walking with us? The image of the Messiah is the image of God coming to walk with us. And if we have seen Christ, we've seen the Father and what do we see Christ doing? Walking with? Everyone? The in the out the with the without the old, the young, the men, the women, the demoniac, the devout. The question before each of us is always and will forever remain, will we choose to walk with God?

And when shame comes? And does, will we hide?

Or will we confess it and keep moving? Will we learn to keep walking to reorient ourselves and keep moving forward? Because this life has a current, the timeline is a moving stream. So, while we are standing still hiding behind a tree, we're actually drifting, drifting away from the center, drifting away from Christ.

So, let's learn and normalize the practice of reorienting and continuing to move forward. Like Enoch, let's walk faithfully with God. And whether it brings earth to heaven like it did for Enoch or if it brings Heaven to Earth, it will surely transform our lives. And now for that pin.

As promised, here's my reflection on September 16 2019, our leap aversary Five years ago Happy leap aversary Erica.

Such a wreck. You love me anyway.

For any of you who are unfamiliar with this term, this is the day Eric and I took a leap of faith and moved to West Chester.

This day always prompts reflection for me 15 years ago today, we packed up our young 22 year old lives on our wedding registry of belongings into my old Chevy Malibu and leaped in some ways I didn't and couldn't understand how far that leap would be, or just how long it would be until we felt ground beneath our feet again.

I could say we landed in West Chester 15 years ago today at that time, and in some ways we did our physical address did change that day. But in many other ways, our hearts were both here and there back with our families who remained four hours away in Tyrone. We also left what little and I do mean little financial stability we hit started to build in the first two and a half months of our young marriage.

And in many ways, I don't believe we began to feel that earth beneath our feet again for years, and even then it was thin Earth.

But there were moments where we felt like we were standing on firm air. Nothing this world could see. But firm in the belief that we were walking out our calling. It seems that we are often tasked with straddling the line between terra firma and terra fidem, faith ground. And yes, I created this word for this context.

Sometimes it's as exciting as it sounds. Others it is as terrifying as it sounds. But in time we have found our footing on both. I credit our relationship for that. We are at the same time a great synergy and counterweight for one another. They say opposites attract but I say complements last, and you my love or my perfect complement.

It's as if God took a rib from my very own side and breathes his creative life into it. You are my Eve which literally translates to breathe, to live to give life.

You have walked this earth with me left it behind as we leapt into the air, walked on air with me, reached for the ground with me and learn to walk a radical middle, straddling this line between terra firma and terra fidem. And above all else that I have loved and grieved and learned and loved again. I cherish you in the US that has resulted from this life we are walking there is a terra firma that we walk in this life.

That one I didn't create terra firma solid ground.

And there's nothing wrong with walking that ground. I'm not here to shame that ground. Who here likes solid ground?

Yeah, me too. Seriously, I like the feeling of earth beneath my feet. And I've experienced a lot of life and learning on that ground. And I believe there is a tear of freedom that we can walk in this life to a faith ground.

Who here could testify about a moment when the earth fell out from beneath their feet and yet they found themselves walking on a different soil.

A soil that felt like the substance of things hoped for an earth that felt more like the evidence of things not seen a soil that doesn't make sense. A ground that had no grounding in the natural but gave us a place to plant our feet as we continued to walk by faith. And again, me too. I've experienced a lot of life and learning on that ground too.

And I have found it is God's presence walking with me that makes Edens out of wastelands.

Even in the shadow of death, I know you are with me.

And this is important too.

It doesn't matter how we got to the shadows. I think sometimes we make this distinction that like if it's not our fault, and life just happens to us, well, then, of course God would be merciful. But if we make a mess of it ourselves, then like it's our own fault and we should punish ourselves.

But David, the same man. I was just reflecting on this this morning, David the same man. And in Psalm 23. We hear even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, you are with me? That's kind of like when life happens. You're walking and you're walking through the shadow. You didn't do anything necessarily to get there but you're walking through the shadow of death. You are with me. The same David writes in Psalm 139. Even if I make my bed in the depths, you were there.

You are there.

God does not stop walking with us.

I want to invite us to take some time this week and express our gratitude to God for continuing to walk with us through failure, shame, envy, anger, and in Kane's case, even murder, for there truly is nothing that will separate us.

I also want to challenge us to consider what are the areas that make us feel naked and ashamed?

What are the thoughts or behaviors that make us want to hide?

And then I want to challenge us to listen for the sound of God walking in the garden in the cool of the day.

Can we hear God call for us and see that they have covered our perceived shame so we can move forward together?

Can we live our lives now inspired by the way we look back and see Enoch lived his by walking faithfully with God on both terra firma and terra feedom? Amen.