

Thoughts on Faith

Faith to me is the stance of the expectant beggar. My first call out of San Francisco Theological Seminary, was on the National Missions field on the western South Dakota prairie. One early spring Sunday afternoon in the living room of one of the ranchers, adult confirmands were either reviewing, or preparing for responding to, the claims upon them to belong to Christ and to become members of the church.

As a recent seminary graduate, I labored in the discussion to frame a question for which to me the only answer could be "faith". I cataloged salient actions of God on our behalf, the cross, forgiveness, providence, life itself. Then I asked, "What is our response?" After a few moments of silence a leathered older rancher blurted out, "Gratitude!" After a moment of recalibrating my own expectation of an answer, I could only affirm, "Yes!"

When the Spirit prepares the heart for this beggar-faith, the response is gratitude.

As a relatively new grandfather myself, I can only imagine the bursting gratitude of the leathered rancher as he, his son and infant grandson came for baptism and confirmed God's claim upon them of life and service.

Eric Iverson, Pastor

On a rainy day I *know* that the sun exists even though I can't see it. My mortal mind wants to deal with faith the same way. Our culture demands proof--if it isn't measurable, visible, documentable, then it must not exist. Many of us are tempted to get scared out of our faith because it isn't provable. But even Einstein acknowledged that some things cannot be figured out. In the April 16, 2007, issue of *Time Magazine*, Walter Isaacson quoted Einstein extensively. He said that Einstein compared humanity to a small child who goes into a large library that is filled with books in many languages. The child senses that there is order in the arrangement of the books but isn't able to figure out what that order is. Einstein said, "The problem is too vast for our limited minds." That makes sense to me. I can't *prove* my beliefs the way I can prove that the sun exists, but I can know intuitively that there is a creative power who has arranged life (and death!) for us. The Bible and its stories of Jesus' life and resurrection offer truth to me. So do lives of people I know--one who spent over twelve years in prison as the result of a false accusation. The other lived for years with debilitating illness. Both maintained active faith--for this life and for what is to come. That helps me believe. My current understanding is as cloudy as an overcast day, yet I live by faith.

Mary Weber, Elder

My life has been (and continues to be) a struggle with the very concept of "faith" – that often illogical and always unprovable belief in the existence of an involved God. Ultimately, we as human beings in general and Presbyterians in particular, are defined by our faith or the absence thereof – Whether and what we believe, how we have come to believe it, what it means to believe it, and our manifestation and reflection of those beliefs in the world. Absent that "faith," we may as well be a part of a well-meaning secular civic club.

It is perhaps in recognition this personal struggle that one of my favorite scriptures is Hebrews 11, which beautifully defines "faith" as "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." Having thus confirmed that we will never have formal "proof" of "faith," Paul then lists a series of flawed Old Testament figures who made radical changes in their lives based only upon their myopic vision of "promises afar off." Significantly, that vision of future promises occurred as a consequence of action; not as a consequence of an intellectual struggle with the issue of "faith."

I thus continue to grapple with the fact that "faith" is generally unsupported by any empirical evidence – a tough concession for this old lawyer. Tougher still is the fact that the exercise of this "faith" almost always getting off my duff and actually doing something. It is in the doing and its fruits that "faith" is proven and, at last, understood.

Catesby Woodford, Elder

Faith is truly a joy-filled, hope-filled, anything-is-now-possible gift. It is an invitation to come and journey with our infinitely creative God, as the beloved Child.

Faith is where the mystery of God's Being enters the depth of our human experience, and we respond to God's presence with awe and praise and love without limit.

Susanne Martin, Pastor

Reading that "faith is the assurance of things hoped for, conviction of things unseen," it is easy to focus on the human assurance and conviction, rather than on the hope and mystery that is the source and object of that assurance and conviction. Faith that focuses upon human assurance and conviction seems to have a hard time moving beyond mere religiosity.

We can only say that, "we have faith" when we also recognize that, "faith has us." Religion becomes a means. Faith is a movement beyond the self for the sake and glory of its source. It is a living relationship that flows both from and toward the same point. The distance between the source and destination is doubt, which is (of course) a gift in the midst of that process.

Kirk Hall, Pastor

My Faith: When decisions and choices have confused or challenged me, my faith has always been available to be my guide. At times, when the challenges seemed too overwhelming, FAITH remained to help me "keep on keeping on."

That faith is simple in its wording, but so profound that all generations struggle to understand and interpret its meaning. In baptism and in ordination as a church officer, I stated my belief in God, and in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Over and over my belief has been strengthened by scripture, the words of theologians, by church music of the ages, by ministers of the word, and by testimony of friends. "My Faith Looks Up to Thee" is a simple but ample hymn summary of all that is basic to my faith.

Ellen Allen, Elder

Faith is a "chain-reaction." When I think about faith, it seems that there is a striking similarity between faith and the nuclear chain reaction. As we all know, once the process begins nothing can stop it and eventually it shows the magnificent power with light, wind and heat. Somehow, it sounds very much like what the Holy Spirit acts, doesn't it? Faith starts from and is based on the word of God only. And it produces hope first, because the word of God points us to the unknown future as Hebrews 11:1 says, "faith is being sure of what we hope for..." and I believe this is the first process of faith. The second reaction of faith is the fact that it gives the believer "perseverance," which is the middle part of faith. James mentions it in James 2:17, "In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead." Without carrying the faith which is the hope, certainty, the word of God, during the course of 'believing' we cannot see the result of what we started for, and it takes our endurance, perseverance, and spiritual will to see what God will do in our future. Lastly, the chain reaction of faith is "the glory of God," which is the result of faith always. So, the true faith starts from the word of God, produces hope, perseverance and results in the glory of God. As long as it is the genuine faith, not our own desire, dream, or fantasy, it should bear powerful results in Christ. Amen. Soli Deo Gloria

Yongwha Kim, Pastor