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SCRIPTURE READINGS

Isaiah 1:1, 10-20

Hebrews 11:1-3; 8-16

Faith is a Verb

“Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.”

Many commentators avoid this verse because they feel it is too hard to interpret. And yet according to Hebrews this what the ancients were commended for. For me this verse speaks to the core of my faith - hope that moves us forward even though we don't necessarily know what's in store.

Perhaps its an age thing or more likely a faith thing but its seems as the years go by I get more and more comfortable with not knowing.

It's true that I am a United Church minister and I have trained at Vancouver School of Theology known for it's liberal teaching. I would be hard pressed to argue that I fall on the conservative, literal end of the Christian spectrum. I understand that part of the task for us as church and even more so for me as minister is to try to make sense of Scripture and faith.

But I will admit that I fully believe that a key part of Christianity and faith is the acceptance of mystery.

The biblical text does not give us a whole list of people who never wondered, never doubted, never questioned, never lived in faith.

Can you imagine if Abraham and Sarah had said?

“Okay God, if you can prove to us right here and now that our entire lives will be smooth sailing from here on in then we will leave our homeland.”

Or if Moses had said; “Well God to be honest I think it's probably a little safer here in Egypt than it is out there in the wilderness so slavery of my people might not be so bad afterall.”

Or if Noah had said “Listen God, I'm not really convinced it's gonna rain all that bad, so I think my family and I will just get a new pair of galoshes and chance it.”

Where would we learn faith, mystery, wonder? Besides the fact that the majority of the Hebrew Bible would be lost, the stories and roots of our faith would be lost. The examples of those who taught us to trust in God would have to be abandoned. The more I read the scriptures the more I see God calling us to respond in grace and life-giving power, not through ritual and empty words but by living our faith.

Faith is about holding fast to the promise of God. Faith propels us forward with God into God's future for us.

Abraham and Sarah show us that faithfulness requires both holding fast and moving forward. They held fast to the promises of children and land in a long faithful journey of waiting. But they moved forward in faith and trust as they journeyed with God. Even though "they did not receive that promise in their lifetime they saw the promise on the horizon, beckoning, calling them onward in their journey of faith. Because they experienced the promise as a call, they held fast to the promises of God, and they also moved forward in response to God's call. They knew that faithfulness is a form of courage that launches out into the unknown, moving into the future with God, knowing the future is God's."¹

As human beings we always have choices to make with opportunities to take certain directions. More than any of us would wish or like to admit we have the option to choose isolation, fear, anxiety, and self-destructiveness or openness, peace, life and health.

The Biblical claim is that God always chooses life and wills well-being for us but will not impose it upon us.

The reality is we live in a unstable world and society that fosters fear and at times it makes sense to be afraid. God never denies that.

The stories of ancestors and saints that we remember are not stories of people who were born with a map in one hand and a lantern in the other who walked a smooth easy, long glorious never troublesome journey of life.

No they are people who felt the fear and chose to keep going anyway. They are people who may have glimpsed at the darkness but chose to live in the light.

Walter Brueggemann claims three types of saints in the church.

- Those through whom the light shines
- Those who no matter what the circumstance give value and respect to all others
- And those who do not run and hide when faced with suffering or death instead they continue to live out love.

Brueggemann goes on to say "Faith is the willingness to trust our lives and our future to God, even when God does not appear to be as reliable as other more immediate supports. Faith is readiness to risk life on the promises of God without holding back.

By faith we come to understand that worlds are prepared by The Holy

By faith, not by sight

By faith, not by financial security

By faith, not by certainty

By faith, not by our addictions

¹ Whitfield, Bryan workingpreacher.org

By faith, not by popular culture
By faith not by our morality.

The Church and our faith will not survive unless we are willing to stake our lives on the gospel, on the fact that God would have us live move forward in trust. Faith cannot be summed up in a simple intellectual process its a verb - a way of living. If we live completely by the motto 'I'll believe it when I see it' we will live stagnant lives.

I recall an event where David Giuliano the former moderator of the United Church was speaking. He began to share with us some of what he had learned in his time in Israel and Palestine. He shared that he had come to understand that 'the opposite of fear is not courage it is faith.' A few short weeks later he used those same words when he announced he was struggling with cancer. When Giuliano was elected moderator his words to the church echoed the words of Jesus "Fear Not."

God is always calling us to new life.

Faith can mean trust or belief, or it may mean a quality of loyalty. It means different things in different situations but the one thing faith is never without is hope. Faith requires hope and hope requires faith and when we journey in faith and hope we journey to new life. Faith is what gives us courage.

I recall sharing the words 'the opposite of fear is not courage it is faith' with a former client. She took a deep sigh, 'oh that is so good to know' she said 'because right now courage is just too much work, but faith, faith I think I can do because it means I get to rest in God and allow him to do the work. "That gives me hope" she said. And hope some days is all we can ask for. In fact with her and others I have learned that some days the fact that others might have hope for us has to be enough.

Faith against popular Christianity is not always certainty point blank - it is more often resting in hope living in the moment believing that God has created us for fullness of life.

Faith isn't always easy - it involves trust and hope in the hardest of times. That is why for me one of the gifts of being a minister is that almost every week I get to write myself a sermon. Remind myself of what I believe and hope and live for.

We have all had the opportunity more than once to live out of fear and anxiety or hope and faith. And most days I live a little of both.

But in those days that the fear consumes me, I am blessed to know I am not alone and that I will again glimpse the light. I know that not because I am some great theologian, but because most of the time I can't bear to live without faith and hope. When I loose hope I loose life - I abandon moving forward - believing in God and myself and others. I become stagnant and depressed.

We are called to live in faith as if God is present because as you do so you will live more fully and so will those around you. After all you never know when The Holy will give us the opportunity to be the one who shines light, or offers grace, or faces fear and lives out of love anyway.

We may or may not be called to be an Abraham or Moses, or Martin Luther King Jr., Mother Theresa or Gandhi but we are called to life! To live in faith and hope. The kind of faith that holds fast while it propels us forward.

Most of us will doubt and that is a part of faith - its when we stop living in hope that we die.

How is God calling you to live today? God is calling us as people as a church to live in faith. "Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see." Don't be afraid God is pleased to give you life.

Amen