

## *Lived faith is love expressed*

*Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16; Luke 12:32-40*

So, what is it that you believe in? What is it that you are hoping for? In the gospel of Luke, we are told that where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. What is it you treasure the most? We are being reminded today that what we hope for is intimately connected to our experience of faith and we should not expect faith to be supported by the surrounding culture.<sup>1</sup> The author of Hebrews, they aren't exactly sure who wrote it, proclaims that faith is the assurance of things hoped for and the conviction of things not seen. This has also been translated in several other versions as the following: Faith is that which give substance to things hoped for and offers approving of things not seen.

Being Christian in this time and place has its challenges. It's hard to have faith in a world that lives by the saying, 'seeing is believing', or a world where something doesn't exist until it can be scientifically proven, or a world where the secular is more prevalent than the sacred. A world that focusses on independence and self-sufficiency, where globalization has led us to live sometimes far away from our family and friends; where technology is what connects us rather than actual human encounter and touch. It's hard to follow God when we aren't sure where God is or where God is leading us, but that is the point of faith, for faith is the assurance of things hoped for and the conviction of things that are not seen.

The verses from the Hebrew passage tells us that faith gives substance to things that are neither present nor visible. Faith is trust in God. One commentator explored faith in this way and suggested that faith is a way of knowing that constantly seeks understanding, leading to theological reflection and to faith as belief in various doctrines about God. Faith is that which enables one to cope with the trials and tribulations of life. Faith is that which has provoked the hostilities and ridicule being heaped on Christian communities and lastly, faith includes the awareness that the meaning of life is not to be found in the accumulation of wealth power and privilege, but rather in loving God and neighbour. Where did you get your faith from? Did somebody inspire you? Was it through your own personal experiences? Was it through reading the scripture? What was it that brought you to your faith? What were those moments or times where you needed something outside of yourself because you felt lost and alone? What was it that brought you to faith?

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<sup>1</sup> John C. Shelley, *Feasting on the Word*, Year C, Volume 3 (Louisville: Westminster, John Knox Press, 2010), p. 330.

When we talk about the hopes we haven't experienced, I wondered what our hopes and dreams are as a community of faith. Do we hope for a world where wealth is truly shared among all people? Do we hope for a world that respects and honours the differences and diversity of people, instead of seeing them as barriers and things that need to be changed? Do we hope for peace and shalom in this world where things are restored and injustice is made right, where there is an abundance and we act out of love, compassion and kindness? Do we hope for a world where everyone feels that they are valued and find ways to share their gifts for the betterment of all? Do we hope for a world where we stop wasting the resources that God has given us in Creation and in this world?

When I look at this list of hopes it might seem a bit impossible to achieve. It might feel like we are constantly failing, but isn't that what faith is about? To have the conviction that the things that can't be seen are possible. Having faith and trusting in God calls us to be alert and ready for what is to come. Having faith means that we will not allow that petty thief to come and steal our confidence in God. The petty thief that the gospel speaks about will not be allowed to stop us from living faithfully in this secular globalized world. The petty thief will not be able to steal our belief in the goodness of all people. We need to be ready; we need to be patient and we need to be as persistent as the boy who wanted a star; who longed for a friend, who longed to be in relationship with something beyond himself. As I read the story, I imagined the little boy seeking God who was the star; waiting to catch the spirit of God, to catch faith.

The gospel states that the things of God are to be given the most urgent priority in every Christians life and we have talked over the last several weeks in the summer about the importance of prayer and spiritual practice. Prayer keeps us focused. Prayer like faith gives us hope and helps us in times of trials. One form of prayer is discernment; the practice of listening to God. Discernment is a process in which we look at different experiences we encounter in prayer and distinguish what leads us toward God and what leads us away from God.

In our most recent statement of faith, 'A Song of Faith', we named these things that lead us away from God in this way. It says:

*'We are all touched by this brokenness. The rise of selfish individualism that erodes human solidarity; the concentration of wealth and power with regard for the needs of all; the toxins of religious and ethnic bigotry; the degradation of the blessedness of human bodies and human passions through sexual exploitation; the delusion of unchecked progress and limitless growth that threatens our home our earth. The covert despair that lulls many into numb complicity with empires and systems of dominion. We sing lament and repentance. Yet evil does not - cannot undermine the overcoming love of God. God forgives and calls all of us to confess our fears and failings with honesty and humility. God reconciles and calls us to repent the part we have played in damaging our world, ourselves and each other. God transforms and call us to*

*protect the vulnerable; to pray for deliverance from evil and to work with God for the healing of the world that all might have abundant life. We sing of grace.'*

We have faith that the world can be healed, that all people and creatures in this world can have abundant life, but it takes the participation of all. Every single one of us, every single decision we make; we need to invest in this promise, the gift that God has given us and that is why we are called to have faith today. Faith is the assurance of things hoped for and the conviction of things not seen. And remember, there is no need to worry; worry is what turns us away from what is most important, worry stops us from living our faith and acting on our faith in the world, but when we let go of our fear, when we trust in God to guide us and support us and encourage us our hearts will be opened and the true treasure will be found; that of love for one another. Always, for we are all blessed gifts of God. For faith is the assurance of things hoped for and the assurance of things not seen. Go out into the world. Make the hope be seen in what you do and how you treat on another. Amen.