

Sermon, June 12, 2022  
Hebrews 11:1-12

### “The Meaning of Faith”

In his book, “The Heart of Christianity”, the late church historian, Marcus Borg, talks about a conversation he had with a woman on an airplane. She said to him, “I’m much more interested in Buddhism and Sufism than I am in Christianity.” When Borg asked why, she replied, “Because they’re about a way of life, and Christianity is all about believing.”

Certainly, she is correct that believing is an important part of Christianity, but wrong in her assertion that it is not about a way of life. However, it is very much the case that many people, both within and outside the church see Christianity as being all about believing various religious claims about God, about Jesus, about the Bible, etc., and such beliefs do play an important part in the life of the church; but such beliefs are also foundational for a particular way of life. Remember, as I pointed out in a recent sermon that in the first century of the church’s history it was known not as Christianity, but as “the Way”. Those who chose to follow Jesus were choosing to live their lives in a certain way - even before the New Testament existed, or the basic doctrines of the church were established.

Also, notice that the author of Hebrews follows today’s reading by drawing attention to some of the great exemplars of faith, such as Noah, and Abraham, and Moses, and their great acts of faith were not based on beliefs concerning doctrine, but, rather, based on their trust in God. As I have mentioned on numerous occasions, trust lies at the heart of faith.

Of course, trust has to be connected to some form of belief. To have trust means to have confidence in something, or someone, beyond ourselves. And, so, we have to believe in the existence of God, before we can place our trust in Him. We also have to believe that God is for us , not against us, if we are to place our trust in Him. And so, faith has both an inward and an outward quality to it. It begins with the acceptance of certain realities, but then manifests itself in terms of actions. In the words of preacher, Thomas Long, “Inwardly, faith moves hearts; outwardly, faith moves mountains.”

Marcus Borg describes faith in four different ways. The first of those is assent. That is faith as belief - a matter of the head. Perhaps the most famous biblical verse comes from the third chapter of John, and reads, “For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” Again, it is a matter of assent, that begins with the belief that God loves the world, second, that we believe in the one that He sent for our sake, and third, that we believe God’s promise of everlasting life.

Next, Borg speaks of faith as trust, and points to Soren Kierkegaard's description of faith as floating in deep water "If you struggle, if you tense up and thrash about, you will eventually sink. But if you relax and trust, you will float." It's reminiscent of the story of Peter walking on the water. As long as he believed and trusted Jesus he had no problem, but as soon as he began to doubt, he began to sink.

Next, we have faith as "faithfulness", meaning that having placed our trust in God, we then offer our allegiance to God - that we enter into a relationship with God, and agree to live our lives in certain ways - meaning, in the Christian sense, to follow the Way that Jesus called us to. We show our faith by living compassionately, caring for those in need, walking in the ways of non-violence and peace, advocating for justice for all, taking the moral high ground.

Fourthly, Borg describes faith as a way of seeing the world. True faith leads us away from fear, and a pessimistic, or cynical view of the world. Faith is optimistic, even idealistic, even in times when all seems to be going to hell in a hand basket. This morning's reading begins with the statement, "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." In other words, it is a way of seeing, perhaps seeing past what appears to be reality to a deeper reality grounded in God - a reality He wants to lead us towards, which we then respond to in faith. And, so, we see that faith is multifaceted, even in terms of human relations when we learn to have faith in one another, and times when it is necessary to have faith in ourselves as individuals. But faith finds its highest expression and its most meaningful experience when it is focused on, and grounded in, the Lord our God! Amen.

**Let us pray:** God, ever loving and wise, we thank you for this day, and all the blessings it comes with. We thank you for the gift of your Holy Church, praying as always, for greater unity within, and we thank you for our congregation. You have called us together to be the Beloved Community, a beacon unto the world, revealing your love for the world, and your desire for peace and harmony within it. Show us the way, Lord, help us to look to your Son, Jesus, that we may better understand your will for us and act accordingly. We thank you for the gift of faith in all of its different manifestations and guides us along the pathways it points us towards. Lord, we thank you for this beautiful planet that you have given us and ask that you help us to be better stewards of it, healing the ways in which it is broken, caring for it in ways that it will remain a blessing for future generations. We also pray for peace upon it. Grant us the wisdom needed to bring an end to needless and pointless violence and put the ways of war behind us. Lead us to stand firm against the prejudices and bigotries that cause so much pain and injustice

in our land, and around the world. We also lift up the many who suffer from hunger, from homelessness, and disease. Make us aware of how we can help and inspire us to act. As always, we pray for those in our own community and beyond, who need to know your healing touch, remembering to you... Amen.