

1 Kings 19:9-18
Romans 10:5-15
Matthew 14:22-33

Rev. Nathan Anderson
Pentecost 10 A
August 13, 2017

Faith ... means trust. Political candidates ask us to have faith in their campaign promises and their abilities. Consumers demonstrate faith in buying products. We trust certain brand names, believing these will deliver what they claim ... cleaner clothes ... whiter teeth ... better complexion ... smoother rides ... better gas mileage ... improved technology. Commercials are testimonials asking for a response of faith.

Faith is the basis of healthy relationships ... friendship ... business partner ... romance & marriage. There may be contractual promises or informal understandings to guide the mutual accountability and responsibilities during storms of controversy or disappointment. When our faith gets shaken, doubts strain the ties which bind us, magnifying our fears, destabilizing the foundations of our lives. Disillusionment may rob us of joy, but illusions certainly don't bring lasting happiness. Confessions of truth eventually create trust because you're demonstrating trustworthiness ... humbly sharing the struggles of failure and discouragement, and the gifts of repentance and forgiveness ... as well as the intimacy of hope, love and peace.

Doubt isn't the opposite of faith ... it is an element of faith itself. Faith is better understood as a process than as a possession ... a verb instead of a noun. Doubts are the ants in the pants of faith ... they keep it moving and searching. Faith is developed through hardship, disappointment, disillusionment, conflict, frustration, failure and loss. These are all a part of life, along with its many blessings. Even great people of faith sometimes get overwhelmed by life's storms. They get on the "pity-pot" and get angry or frightened. These waves of emotions might catch us and others by surprise.

Consider the prophet Elijah in our lesson from 1st Kings, when he hid in a cave to retreat from persecution and fear. He sounds like a broken-record, repeating his complaints of gloom and doom. We can empathize, can't we, sometimes wishing we could crawl into some cave to escape the cause of our anxieties? Elijah wonders where God is in the mighty winds of change, in the shattering power of earthquakes, and the raging heat of fire. Yet the greatest power comes to the prophet in a moment of silence ... confronting Elijah with his purpose and mission in life. God listens to him whine ... then virtually ignores any validation of these complaints by bringing a new focus of opportunity and a reminder of blessings which remain and will yet bear fruit. So get to work! Crawl back out of your cave. Shift out of neutral gear!

Survivors of any crisis know how important this is, and how easy it is to get stuck or stalled in some type of post-traumatic stress disorder. Things we took for granted are somehow gone, and life is forever changed. Now what? We're overwhelmed by the storm we're in, or the storm we keep reliving after surviving it.

None of us are immune to storms ... they just come, uninvited, unexpected, unwelcome, unjust. We can't explain why some people are badly hurt, and others are unscathed. Sometimes the unscathed survivors struggle with confused feeling of guilt.

Elijah isn't feeling lucky to have survived persecution. He's angry and scared, suffering a paralysis of analysis regarding things he can't understand. His batteries are drained ... and God confronts Elijah with a barrage of power surges beyond human control. The prophet is humbled, but not recharged. God's power surge of faith came in the midst of silence ... commissioning Elijah to refocus on what he had yet to do within the larger community of faith.

July brought storms and flooding to our Chain'O'Lakes community, wreaking havoc to people's homes. Earthquakes, droughts, tornadoes, and fires bring devastation to other towns and nations described in the evening news. Most of us can remember times we've been on the road when the weather turned nasty, and the radio emergency broadcast sounded alarms. We have felt powerful storms, pelted by wind and rain, enveloped by eerie golden green clouds. Do we pull over to wait, or slowly proceed in faith toward our destination? Only hindsight seems to reveal the better choice.

Faith is not being sure what's going to happen or even where we're going, but going anyway. It is confidence in God's faithfulness to us in uncertain times on an uncharted course through an unknown future. Peter was the disciple who was willing to step out of the boat, showing the most courage, yet how easily he was distracted by the storm's power. He knew doubt, yet also felt the strong arm of Jesus around him. Peter discovered what it means to say: "Lord, I believe, help Thou my unbelief!"

Doubt sees the obstacles; Faith sees the way. Doubt sees the darkest night; Faith sees the day. Doubt dreads to take a step; Faith soars on high. Doubt questions: "Who believes?" Faith answers: "I do!" Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, and the conviction of things not seen. A friend of mine who loves puns once told me: "When you're in doubt, you might as well faith it!" I remember a plaque which advised: "Feed your faith, and your doubts will begin to starve to death."

No doubt you have stories of doubts and faith in the midst of life's storms. Have they revealed new purposes in your life, reminding you how the Lord is present? Such testimonials of trust strengthen the body of Christ in our midst. Stepping out of one's boat or crawling out of one's cave enrolls you in Faith 101. Someone needs your witness! More than one person is healed and strengthened when we share our faith, our hope, forgiveness and love ... in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Amen.