

A man fell off a cliff but managed to grab a tree limb on the way down. The following conversation ensued: "Is anyone up there?" "I am here. I am the Lord. Do you believe me?" "Yes, Lord, I believe. I really believe, but I can't hang on much longer." "That's all right. If you really believe you have nothing to worry about. I will save you. Just let go of the branch." After a momentary pause, he asked, "Is anyone else up there?"

It is difficult to live by faith! We're better with what we can see. More comfortable counting on what we can prove. And we do better with faith when we feel in control!

When illness or death strikes, isn't it difficult to catch your breath, slow down a racing heart, and keep from a total meltdown of fear and panic? When you lose a job or a relationship falls apart, and you don't know where to turn, isn't it difficult to surrender everything to God?

There are times when faith seems to be all around (and times when it doesn't seem to be enough. When do you seem to have the most trouble with faith?

The disciples figured if a little is good, more is better, and so, "increase our faith!" Jesus responded, "if you used only a grain of faith, like a tiny seed, you could make trees dance on the ocean!" Translated that means "faith is God's breath in you." Even a fragment of faith is all the power you need. Just use it!

Do you remember the Wizard of Oz, and all the "what ifs?" If only a heart! If I only had a brain! If only I had courage!" And in the end, each discovered those gifts were already handy. They simply needed to open them up! Faith isn't something you can work for, earn, or achieve. It is a gift God gives, whether deserved or not. It is a gift preloaded and fully charged. Rather than something we can control, it has the remarkable ability to control us.

When anyone asks, "increase our faith!" consider the assumption of such a demand. It orders God to give more than he has given. It presupposes what God has given isn't enough to make a difference. It is the feeling that what God has given isn't good or full enough to make a difference.

Jesus' response to his disciples is the same for us today. "What do you mean by more? Why not just use what you have been given! Why do you think you need more when you haven't even opened up the gift and allow its potential?"

That is no different than a little child rejecting a present simply because they don't like the shape of the box or the color of the wrapping paper, without even opening the gift to see what is inside! Anyone can have faith when they don't need it, but unless we practice faith regularly, how can we know how to live by faith when there is no other way?

Think of the great stories of faith from the Bible: Abraham leaving home for unknown future. Moses standing up against mighty pharaoh. Joshua leading refugee band against fortified cities. John standing in river waiting for Messiah. Peter walking on water (even if only for a moment.) And disciples sharing the reality of an empty tomb that was beyond their ability to explain.

Because the gift of faith is so often neglected, covered with dust, or forgotten from neglect, God sent his Jesus to reveal and restore the power of our faith. Jesus showed what it means to live by faith.

How else would you describe his descent into darkness of death? Or his cry of anguish from the cross. Our concern that God has forsaken us is a typical complaint, and Easter's answer proclaims we are anything but forsaken.

Our world assumes faith should erase suffering and the suffering should be rewarded. Paul lived in a world where suffering was the norm and kept the faith despite few earthly rewards. Somehow, somewhere along the line, we seem to have lost something in translation!

Luther said: "God has made all things depend on faith so that whoever has faith will have everything, and whoever does not have faith will have nothing. Saint Augustine said, "Faith is to believe what we don't see, and the reward of faith is to see what we believe." Faith isn't a cowardly act hiding and hoping for a change, but an aggressive, active, confident, walk knowing God is by our side!

In "Wishful Thinking" Frederick Buechner wrote this: "Even questioning God can be a use of faith, as we allow faith to direct our questions in the right direction! Faith is your gift. You have all you need. Either use it or waste it ... waiting around will never accomplish anything. Faith is better understood as a verb than as a noun, as a process than as a possession. It is on-again-off-again rather than once-and-for-all. Faith is not being sure where you're going but going anyway. A journey without maps. As Paul Tillich said that doubt isn't the opposite of faith; it is an element of faith."

Faith doesn't need to make sense; and it doesn't need proof. Just like trusting Mom or Dad to be there it is correctly a way to describe life with God.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was given a job offer at prestigious school in U.S. during World War Two to keep him safe. Instead, knowing he risked certain death, he returned to Germany saying he couldn't stand by and watch others suffer and no one stand up for the Gospel! Is that folly or faith? When he was murdered by the Nazis, had God let him down or was his faithfulness what the story is all about? Faith is never about what makes sense to the world, but about the power that defies and changes the world.

One night a house caught fire and a young boy was forced to flee to the roof. The father stood on the ground below with outstretched arms, calling to his son, "Jump! I'll catch you." He knew the boy had to jump to save his life. All the boy could see, however, was flame, smoke, and blackness. As can be imagined, he was afraid to leave the roof. His father kept yelling: "Jump! I will catch you." But the boy protested, "Daddy, I can't see you." The father replied, "But I can see you and that's all that matters."

That is what Jesus' outstretched arms from cross were all about. Let go and have faith, for even though you can't see into the darkness, I can see you.

If only I had faith? That is like child's tantrum saying, "you don't love me." If I only had faith? The better question is "why not try it and see how it works?"

A special text on my wall says, "When you come to the edge of all the light you know and are about to step off into the darkness of the unknown, FAITH is knowing one of two things will happen. There will be something solid to stand on, or you will be taught how to fly."