

FAITH UNASHAMED

We all have faith. Even if we don't have faith in a divine being, we learn faith from our culture. We have faith in the church pews that you're sitting on, pews that have seated people for decades, will one more time hold us – that's why we sit on them. We have faith in so many things that are part of daily life.

Having moved to Canada just two weeks ago, one has faith that the paperwork you come with will give you smooth entry through the border. I have come to learn that faith is often misplaced.

We have faith in people, in their friendship, in their trust; however too often we find that that faith is disappointed. Even so, faith is a good thing because it gives value to those with whom we invest faith.

During my years of Christian ministry I have met many people who placed their faith in God or in the church, but circumstances didn't go the way they hoped or anticipated and sadly they were left feeling disappointed. Indeed some lost faith.

Probably the greatest sadness is when we lose faith in ourselves. Our fears and anxieties sabotage our hopes and dreams. How often have we heard said, he/she is their own worst enemy. Wasted faith or at least it feels that way.

1. Faith is good.

The wisdom of the scriptures tell us that “faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”

If we take that to heart, then my comment about the pew isn't really faith, because we can see it. Faith is given to us for the realm of the unknown, the things that we cannot see. Faith is not tangible, we cannot touch it with our hands, yet we might be able to touch it with our spirit.

The Christian religion is very specifically about relationship. Other religions may not be as obviously so. Christianity is about a personal relationship with God, through Jesus; it is about personal relationships with the Church, and it is about collective relationships – the Church (all who believe) in relationship with God. Even the Trinity (our declaration of God) – Creator, Christ and Spirit are in relationship with one another.

Yet most of these relationships are not seen. Even our relationship with the Church, we only see a localized representation – we don't see the connection with the global Church. But our faith tells us we are not alone.

Recently, it was my honor to sit on an interview panel for those seeking ordination as MCC clergy. It took me back to the time when I first interviewed. One of the questions I was asked, “What are your weaknesses?”. I responded, “faith – some days I believe some days I don't thankfully, there are more believing days.” The panel were taken aback. But I truly articulated

the reality – that’s how it is. After their deliberations they called me back. In addressing my weaknesses they commented “we think you have more faith than most people we have interviewed.”

Years later, I heard Mother Teresa say that she frequently had difficulty in believing in God. However, that difficulty did not and does not prevent us from acting in faith.

2. Faith is not a creed it’s an action.

Faith begins with an assurance that God loves us. Can I prove it? Yes.

I don’t know how our world came into being. I’m assured that it evolved – scientific testing informs us how old this planet is. Having lived in the path of hurricanes for twelve years and been through three destructive ones, I know the power of nature, yet I’m amazed that after every devastation nature renews itself in beauty. That gives me faith that its source is wholeness and good. Whether we attribute this to the Creator in the Genesis story or to the power of Mother Earth, it gives me faith that there is a divine source who is good and who is love.

Because people are willing to lay down their lives for their friends or their country; because people will reach out to the neighbors, to their community even to a stranger in time of need, I’m assured that the source of our faith is good and love. You might argue that you don’t need God for this to happen – but for me, I don’t believe that the goodness and love are natural, rather it is a greater power surrounding us and working within us.

MCC and other affirming congregations have been bold over the last forty years in declaring God’s love for all people – whoever you are, wherever you are in life.

Alas, we’re just humans, and still learning what that means – often we look at the church and we don’t see it – but my faith tells me that God loves me, God loves you.

Of course, many people will say this, but you realize that there is small print (like the ad on tv) which says ‘due to our limited ability to understand God what you receive may not be exactly what you were expecting. There are conditions subject to my own understanding.’

3. Faith Unashamed

I’m the new kid on the block. I hope it will be an exciting time in the life of the MCC congregation – not exciting in terms of drama (enough already) but exciting in terms of growing, in making new connections, in becoming a place where God’s love really does have a central place. I have been director of an lgbt centre; I have worked in safer sex education; I’ve been a gay activist, but through all of this faith has been my motivation, and these actions come out of my understanding of what Jesus taught us.

I’m not ashamed of what I believe, or of the ministry that I have done in Jesus’ name. My motivation is not to convert people, but that people might see and understand that God does love them.

Once I understand that God loves me then I realize that God does not hate me or condemn me (or the people around me) for who I am. Once we grasp this, we have the beginnings of freedom and the beginnings of healing.

I recognize that church culture in the US, where I've been living for the past fifteen years is different to church culture in Canada. Believe me, when I first moved there I was astounded how everyone had an opinion about church ... but I soon found that much of it was just that – talk.

Britain is different – it used to be said that you should never talk about religion and politics in polite company. Most people's experience of church either boring and uninspiring, the Church of England often being referred to as God's *frozen* people.

Is this faith? All too often we confuse church culture with faith, when it is merely one expression of faith. Faith is not in the label we wear, but in the effectiveness of what we do. Our name is Metropolitan Community Church – we are proud to be church in community.

a) We have a challenge to renew ourselves – being the gay church is no longer sufficient. Gay marriage is a national right, and therefore our civil rights as glbt people are somewhat protected. We need to be a church open and accepting to all who affirm the dignity and integrity of same gender loving people. I want to celebrate the decision by the Episcopal Church in the USA., made this week, in lifting the *de facto* moratorium on the ordination of lesbian and gay clergy candidates and the election of openly lesbian and gay bishops.

b) We have to become a voice in our community for justice – a justice that is not based on right or left politics but a justice based on the teachings of Jesus. Some of this we heard in our second reading. For this to happen we need to be looking outward as well as inward. In many ways we are a church without walls.

c) We have to be a church where faith is alive, so that what we do, what we say, what we sing, and what we pray becomes reflective of the faith within us. Whether you follow Jesus of Nazareth, the Crucified Savior, the Risen Christ, or the Christa, may the Christ in you come alive through love. Whether your faith is traditional, evangelical, liberal, progressive, metaphysical or post-Christian, may it come alive in you. For this is not a conflict ground for the right theology, it is a common ground for all who live and love in faith.

Love yourself; love the God who loves you; so that when it comes to faith, you need not be ashamed.