

SERMON: FAITH & DOUBT: *“I believe; help my unbelief!”*

Rev. Geoff Ross Sunday, February 21, 2021 St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church.

[Start new series:start by asking – ‘do you have doubts about God/Jesus/HS?’/‘What about heaven?’/‘Any of it real?’/‘Does prayer work?’ Do you ask questions like that? Late at night/alone/moments of crisis:do you struggle/wrestle with faith? To be honest: I do – at times/asked all of those questions. But also have faith – I believe you can have both “Faith & Doubts”/believe each informs the other/makes both healthier....]

There are two things that I need to say upfront: First; we all live – and are saved – at the mercy of God. If it were not for God's mercy/grace/love we would not have been created/cared for/protected and, finally, saved in/through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ. As I said during the Ash Wednesday service; we cannot get to heaven on our own/can't get there from here/by ourselves/own merit/skill/wealth/power – none of us will get out of here alive/or to heaven without the saving work/action/sacrifice of Jesus and His blood/death/resurrection. That's the first thing that we need to accept; the second is this: we all live – and will die – at the mercy of what we believe. What this means is this: while we have the choice/‘power’ to decide what we believe/hold to be true; we need to know that what we choose to believe has consequences – it will determine our fate. No pressure!

[Nature of F&D – 1:Doubt/inescapable part of human condition/DNA:It's part of life/living-no escaping it. No Doubt-free guarantees:Choices-. 2:We all have them: ‘questions’/‘reservations’/‘hesitations’/‘anxieties’ – doubts:part of the process of discernment/growth/experience. 3:We all live by faith. Not everything can be proven/things just are in life – ‘convictions’/ ‘beliefs’ – held/accepted as right/true; but still we seek confirmation/knowable facts. 4:Doubt can make faith stronger – ask the father in our story.]

Anyone who has stared for hours at an optical illusion for hours (yes/both 2 vases/faces-at same time!) knows that you no-matter how often someone tell you that it's there, until you see it/you don't believe it! And, while this statement claims that seeing-is-believing, it is also speaking to something that I've long believed: you can't intellectualize a leap of faith! You can't make the leap by sight/belief – you have to commit to it and leap! In this way, belief/faith isn't something that you think about/choose; it's something that you act/do/commit to. Saying isn't believing/trying harder doesn't make it happen:giving in to it does – and there's no holding back when you leap!

But that doesn't mean you have to be 100% certain/convicted/prepared to make that jump. There are times when a decision require commitment when you/I/we don't have total certainty. In fact, most important decisions in life happen this way – right? No ‘Pro/Con’ list will convince you – (Getting married/children/job...) – these require passion/engagement/all-in commitment not necessarily total certainty. It's the same with faith. Soren Kierkegaard/19th Century/Danish philosopher/theologian wrote of *“faith as a passion”* – it is a decision that requires the same commitment as marriage/having children:100% commitment/no 100% guarantees! And this is what's going on in the frantic father in our reading.

[NOTE: Today's reading/immediately after "Transfiguration" reading Wayne/used/preached on last week: a mountain-top/experience-vision/revelation of God/God's plan and Jesus' identity/purpose. Mountains: Bible place to meet God! Abraham/Moses/Ezekiel/Elijah – now Jesus. Transfiguration: glimpse of power/possibility of God – not 'up-there' but 'down-here'/not removed/now God with-us! Glimpse of full purpose of God's saving plan: to make us a "new creation" by God's mercy.]

Caught in an ongoing health crisis with his 'way of life'/things once thought safe/secure/sound/stable either falling apart/failing, with his son dying as a result of some unknown affliction, the father in our reading doesn't have the 'mountain-top'/ecstatic experience of knowing Jesus is who He/they/others say He is; in fact he's probably been waiting/desperate/with his fear that he has to do something/anything to save his son – and his hope. First, he asked/begs/pleads with the disciples to help – but the text tells us that they couldn't pray/cast out the boy's disease. Jesus tells His disciples to bring the boy to Him - and He speaks to the father, who answers/appeals/petitions Jesus saying; *"if you are able to do anything, have pity on us and help us."* Catching the father's 'iffy' doubt, Jesus tells him/us/you/me that *"All things can be done for the one who believes."* And, in tears, the father *"cried out, I believe; help my unbelief."*

How many of us – if we're truly honest with ourselves – have cried/prayed this prayer? We believe/have hope/pray but doubt: I get this prayer/I've prayed it – many times. And will again. In those moments I've crashed into the reality that I'm not in control/charge/capable to do whatever needs to be done – realized that I'm fallible/finite – and that I can only surrender/give in/commit myself to the One who not only made/knows me but who alone can answer prayer/return hope/fulfill faith. Jesus asks that we believe – AND to be honest about who we are(faults/failings included). And, as He did with the boy, He offers to us new life. This is what the Table – and the meal prepared for us/by Him – represents: it is the place where we can bring true ourselves/our faith and doubt to Him/where He will receive us/where we will receive His mercy – and save us. Amen.