

Verbalizing Faith
Hebrews 3:1-3
August 4, 2019

Intro to worship service:

During the months of June and July, Linda Freeman and I taught several classes called, "What the Heck Do I Believe?" (Linda Freeman came up with that title; not me.) Our purpose was to help class participants find words to describe what they believe. To take what is in here (point to heart) and move it to here (point to mouth). We also explored how our beliefs shaped our responses to the world.

Over 40 people took the class. 7 of them are sharing their Statements of Faith with you today. You will find them throughout the worship service today

Sermon

Today we are talking and hearing about faith. What is faith? And why is it important?

You get in the car and drive on faith. You don't know if you're going to make it to your destination alive or not, but you go. You have faith that the food you buy that is grown by strangers is not harmful, so you eat it. You have faith that the doctors you see are competent. So you put yourself in their hands.

If you did not have faith, if you did not trust others you wouldn't be able to drive, eat, or get help in times of sickness. Your life would be very difficult. So faith is needed, but faith is only as good as the object in which it is placed.

Our scripture passage today defines faith. Before we read, let us pray.

Prayer: Stir in us now, Holy Spirit, a willingness to hear, the desire to know the truth and the courage to follow in joyful obedience, that we may be formed by your word into women and men of faith. Amen.

Read Hebrews 11:1-3

And I am going to add on verse 6: "And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to God must believe that God exists and that God rewards those who earnestly seek him."

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

What is faith?

First of all, what it is not:

Faith is not positive thinking. Faith is not a hunch that is followed. Faith is not hoping for the best, hoping that everything will turn out all right. Faith is not a feeling of optimism.

Our scripture passage defines faith in this way: "Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see" (Hebrews 11:1). In other words, faith is the peg on which we hang our hopes. Faith provides a ground to which we may hold fast. But faith also orients us toward the future and gives us courage to move forward.

I call up Mary Lee Haas to read her statement of faith.

Why did we offer this class, "What the Heck Do I Believe?"

Many of you have expressed the desire to learn how to talk about your faith.

I shared with story with the class: Before I was a pastor, I worked in a hospital. My undergrad degree was in Nutrition. One day, my boss said, "I wish I had your faith." It was a perfect time to talk about my faith, but I said nothing. I didn't know how to express my faith in words.

The Bible says this, "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have." We are called to share our faith, so it is important to find words to describe what you believe in here (point to heart).

I remember going to a conference, and one of the speakers said, "I believe the reason why our denomination is shrinking is because we have forgotten how to talk about our faith to the outside world."

It is important to be able to express our faith – for ourselves, to help us understand what we believe. For others, in a world that is drifting.

As I mentioned, in this class we had people write their own statement of faith. There are many ways to write a Statement of Faith. It can be done logically, writing a paragraph on God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, the sacraments, the church. I had to do it that way when I became ordained.

It can be done in story form. I often share this story: I grew up with a faith that was quite legalistic. I believed I had to earn God's love with perfect obedience, and it was a great burden to carry because I never knew if I was good enough.

I remember the day my faith took a paradigm shift. I was at seminary (of all places) in a systematic theology class, and the professor was reviewing different kinds of theology. On this particular day, he was teaching Reformed Theology, and he said 3 words that changed my life: "God chose you."

The words hit me like a thunderbolt. GOD chose me? You mean it didn't have anything to do with me? God loves me not based on anything I have done, but simply because God loves me? It was like a burden lifted off of my shoulder. It was at that moment I began the journey of understanding and experiencing the grace of God. I now obey God not because I have to but because I want to. I am thankful this day for God's grace. It is the theme of my life.

This is a statement of faith in story form. I tell it as often as I can. This is a great way to talk about God and your faith. I encourage you to have your own story ready. Tell a story when you knew God was alive and active in your life. People can relate to that because we are all on a spiritual journey. And as we tell our stories, it says to others that God isn't just a distant idea but someone who is active and real in our lives.

A Statement of Faith can be a poem. You will hear one in poetry form during communion when Judy Aguayo reads hers.

A statement of faith can be a tattoo. Look at picture on front of our bulletin. It is a tattoo. Someone is making a statement about faith on their body.

I have a tattoo. My tattoo is a statement of faith – I am ready to explain it when someone asks me about it. It is purple rain falling on a cross with a flower growing up around it. I call it "New Life in Christ." I am ready to talk about it when I am asked what it means.

Call up Diane Hartley to read her Statement of Faith.

I want you to think about this sentence: I believe.....How would you finish it? Think of something deeply heartfelt. I guarantee you will be uplifted, stirred, strengthened when you verbalize your faith.

On the sermon notes page, you may have noticed I wrote down how to write a statement of faith. I encourage you to go home and give it a try. By the time the service is done today, you will have heard at least 11 examples of Statements of Faith, including the choir.

I believe.

Amen.