

**Faith**  
by Erica Bartlett  
3-27-10

It calls itself Faith,  
not a name I would have chosen,  
long since disenchanted  
by the concept  
of anything intervening,  
answering prayers,  
or working miracles.  
I have no expectations  
of happy endings.  
Where has faith gotten  
our embattled, broken world?  
Still it clings, tenacious,  
despite my questions,  
poking and prodding.

Where is proof?  
How do I know  
that anything will answer  
my pain,  
make sense of it,  
give it meaning?

These are pleas,  
born of an ache to believe  
when I cannot.

It fixes me with clear eye,  
reflecting the questions  
back to me,  
answers perhaps contained  
therein.

What is it, if not  
faith,  
to believe in the invisible  
workings of your body,  
that the ground will meet  
your feet  
with every stride,  
that your dancing fingers

will capture  
the electrical pulses  
of your mind,  
pulling words out of  
nothing?  
Is it not a miracle  
that every morning  
brings the rising sun,  
the moon riding high,  
tugging tides  
like bedclothes,  
gravity working  
ceaselessly?

I shake my head.  
But can that be  
faith  
if it does not require  
my belief,  
if it offers this daily  
confirmation?

Then what of love?  
it asks, sly,  
knowing for that I have no  
proof,  
only evidence,  
the truth of it revealed  
by our responses  
to grief,  
to pain,  
to questioning.

I fall silent, considering,  
buoyed slowly  
by an intangible glow  
in my heart.  
Perhaps this is faith  
enough.

## Faith – A Different Kind of Knowing

by John Howard

Faith is of the heart.

Faith is a kind of belief having more to do with the heart than the mind. Thomas Moore, in his book The Soul's Religion, said, "Belief is a word of love, not thought. It comes from a Germanic root meaning to hold dear. Belief is an endearment. We are drawn to a certain way of imagining experience by its beauty." This type of belief is what we can also call faith.

Faith is of action

While a belief that doesn't lead to action is no less a belief, faith is inextricably bound to action. I'm thinking of the book by Kenneth Stokes called Faith is a Verb, and while this isn't strictly true (faith is actually a noun), it illustrates the idea that faith with a capital "F" requires a kind of commitment, or as St. Paul said, "faith without works is dead."

There is another sense in which action is linked to faith, suggested by the expression "cultivating faith." Spiritual exercise is often prescribed as a way of deepening faith: meditation, study, being active in a spiritual community. Self-affirmations are a kind of faith-based action taken to build self-esteem. Similarly, Olympic athletes prepare for a performance by visualizing the event in great detail. These are examples of exercises that increase faith. Consider the bumper sticker "visualize world peace". One can say I *believe* that war is not the answer, but for world peace to be a matter of faith, one must actively work towards it, and regularly visualizing a world with no war can really help.

Faith and sacred doubt

Like Archie Bunker, we sometimes think that for something to be an article of faith it must be fundamentally unprovable. If it were provable, we wouldn't *need* faith. But I don't think that faith must necessarily fly in the face of evidence. Rather it gives a basis for decisions when perhaps not all the evidence is in. In this way faith is very practical, especially for the big questions, like our principle of the inherent worth and dignity of all people. I have occasionally wondered about this, but I admire Anne Franke – you know, "I still believe that people are basically good" - even while I rather doubt that her methods were entirely scientific. It seems faith can provide a basis for action and criteria for choosing, when the jury is still out. This sort of faith tends to be durable and resilient, and though matters of faith do at time require revision, this is always a serious matter, requiring much soul searching. Which is why we have the expression "a crisis of faith".

Thomas Moore tells of being in the seminary and on the verge of being ordained when he decided to leave the ministry and strike out alone, all because of this tiny kernel of doubt. He speaks about it: "I could feel it, though I couldn't name it.

It was an embryo. I hadn't chosen it; it had come to me...It was like my hair turning gray or a mole appearing on my skin. It was only a spot of doubt, but that tiny particle was a life form I couldn't ignore. It generated all the life that followed."

I agree with the theologian Karen Armstrong who in her book The Case for God said, "Religion was never supposed to provide answers to questions that lay within the reach of human reason...Religion's task, closely allied to that of art, was to help us to live creatively, peacefully, and even joyously with realities for which there were no easy explanations and problems that we could not solve: mortality, pain, grief, despair, and outrage at the injustice and cruelty of life."

Faith exists in community

So what have we got so far? Faith is of the heart, it is linked with action, and it is not rigid and fixed. There's one final piece: Faith happens in community. We are social animals and are drawn into communities of shared values and meanings. So as much as I'd love to have it all figured out for myself without any input from you, that's not the way it works. And that's a good thing, because when life takes an abrupt turn, which it sometimes does, then the most important kind of faith is not the faith that I practice, but the faith that is practiced on me. When things are at their darkest, I remember that I'm not alone. I can call to mind role models and sustaining memories that get me through. That is what transforms faith from something theoretical and abstract into something warm, real and sustaining.

**Finding Faith** – Rick Kimball

*Faith of our fathers, living still  
In spite of dungeon, fire and sword,  
Oh how our hearts beat high with joy  
Whenever we hear that glorious word.*

*Faith of our fathers, holy faith,  
We will be true to thee till death.*

*Faith of our fathers.* That stirring old hymn has moved in and out of my mind since we first chose faith as the focus of this service. I could sing the hymn for you now, but I choose not to destroy any faith you may have in my musical ability.

*Faith of our fathers.* The words carry me back to October, 1961, the autumn of my senior year in college. I sat at a desk piled high with possibilities for my future, among them divinity school catalogs.

Should I apply? Would I? I heard a faint call toward ministry. But I declined. I said no because I lacked faith, the faith of our fathers or anybody else. I lacked the

religious belief I felt was required to answer the call. What would I say at a God-school interview? I had no idea.

So I answered the call of the military instead, married Tirrell, and served for two years at an Air Force station in southern Italy, working hard, protecting the world from itself. Unsuccessfully, but I tried.

A bit later, in the early seventies, Tirrell and I wandered through the doors of this church, sons in tow. Here, through the years, to my great surprise, here, midst the doubters and the skeptics, the atheists and agnostics and the very few believers, here I found faith. I even found God – but only after first helping chase God from the church.

There were years when God talk troubled many here, conjuring anew the faith of our fathers, the doctrines of our pasts. So we expunged God from our hymns, our anthems, our talk. “That’s a good reading,” we sometimes said. “But let’s take the G-word out,” and we did.

This church is a good place to find faith. Together we doubt, we search, we talk, we explore. Together we grow and develop new ways. We find what we find and I found faith in the form of great mystery, the enigmatic force, the unknowable truth I sometimes dare to call God.

That God word still shakes some among us, though the shake is mild compared to our one-time group shudder. For my part, I wonder how I cannot believe in God when as a UU I can define God as the name for whatever it is I do believe in.

But my faith is meaningless to me and to you if it disappears and dissipates in the fog of mystery by whatever name. Human faith gains significance and impact as it reaches back to itself and touches people. Unitarian Universalism recognizes that in many ways, just one of which I will mention here now, and that is its acceptance and use of humor.

In our opening words, UU minister Barry Andrews uses the amusing words of Archie Bunker to help define faith. UU hero Ralph Waldo Emerson once said that the first criterion of success is “to laugh often and much” – those words just sung by choir members. Visit our denominational website and you can rapidly find your way to a series of UU jokes in a curriculum published by the UUA itself. Here’s what a UU prayed, according to one: “Dear God, if there is a God, if you can, save my soul, if I have a soul.” Says another: “Unitarian Universalism, where all your answers are questioned.”

At Allen Avenue we laugh often and much. We laugh at least once in almost every single Sunday morning service, and at many memorial services as well. We gather at this church in humor and in faith.

To me, humor is faith. It leads us to laugh, to giggle, to chuckle, to chortle in the face of what can be a dreary, devastating and destructive world. We engage with dark humor, and laugh at death itself. "A UU died and was on a road and came to a fork. One sign pointed to heaven, and another to a discussion about heaven. The UU went to the discussion."

I sometimes reflect that had I grown up in a church like this I would have completed and submitted that application for divinity school. Had I done that, then, who knows, I might be standing in this pulpit today speaking to you of faith – and getting paid for it.

But not, I hope, at the cost of our present system, our fruitful mix of professional and lay voices joined in search and discovery, a mix of congregants seeking and sometimes, as in my case, finding faith.

*Faith of our fathers?* No, too patriarchal, sexist, and backward looking. But the melody of that old hymn still runs through my head, so I offer a new version, with this first verse:

*Faith is the hope of our joined destiny,  
Nurtured in womb of deep mystery,  
Blessed with the promise of freedom to be,  
Resounding song of humanity.*

*Faith is the sound of future's call,  
With hope and love of one and all.*

May it be so.

## **Faith Quotes**

various authors

If there was no faith there would be no living in this world. We couldn't even eat hash with safety. ~Josh Billings, *His Complete Works*, 1888

Faith, to my mind, is a stiffening process, a sort of mental starch. ~E.M. Forster

Faithless is he that says farewell when the road darkens. ~J.R.R. Tolkien

He who has faith has... an inward reservoir of courage, hope, confidence, calmness, and assuring trust that all will come out well - even though to the world it may appear to come out most badly. ~B.C. Forbes

A faith of convenience is a hollow faith. ~Father Mulcahy, M\*A\*S\*H

Faith makes things possible, not easy. ~Author Unknown

Faith... must be enforced by reason.... When faith becomes blind it dies.  
~Mahatma Gandhi

Faith and doubt both are needed - not as antagonists, but working side by side to take us around the unknown curve. ~Lillian Smith

In faith there is enough light for those who want to believe and enough shadows to blind those who don't. ~Blaise Pascal

Faith can move mountains, but don't be surprised if God hands you a shovel.  
~Author Unknown

Sometimes, as practice for trying to convince myself that God exists, I try to convince my shadow that the sun exists. ~Robert Brault

A casual stroll through the lunatic asylum shows that faith does not prove anything. ~Friedrich Nietzsche

Faith is believing in things when common sense tells you not to. ~George Seaton

Faith is taking the first step even when you don't see the whole staircase.  
~Martin Luther King Jr.

Scientists were rated as great heretics by the church, but they were truly religious men because of their faith in the orderliness of the universe. – Albert Einstein

Democracy is itself, a religious faith. For some it comes close to being the only formal religion they have. – E. B. White

Faith is not belief. Belief is passive. Faith is active – Edith Hamilton

A garden is evidence of faith. It links us with all the misty figures of the past who also planted and were nourished by the fruits of their planting. – Gladys Taber

Loyalty to a petrified opinion never yet broke a chain or freed a human soul. – Mark Twain

I feel no need for any other faith than my faith in the kindness of human beings. I am so absorbed in the wonder of earth and the life upon it that I cannot think of heaven and angels. – Pearl S. Buck

Elvis fans believe the King lives, baby – there are sightings every day, from a beach in Singapore to a Burger King in Detroit. If only Christians had that kind of faith. – Rev. Susan Sparks, Baptist minister

I can't understand why people don't think God has a sense of humor, given I Kings chapter 5, verse 9, where the Lord strikes all the Philistine with hemorrhoids. – Rev. Susan Sparks, Baptist minister