

*(Faith is an attitude that helps us enter into life even when what is ahead remains unknown.)*

“We walk into that which we cannot yet see.”

Remember Elizabeth Alexander’s poem for the inauguration?

The poet calls it “Praise Song for the Day.”

“We walk into that which we cannot yet see.”

I understood it to be about the black experience of slavery and struggle and the human desire to reach out with faith in the future.

“We cross dirt roads and highways that mark the will of someone  
and then others who said,

‘I need to see what’s on the other side.’”

Maybe that is a little like it was for those fishermen who began to follow Jesus.

They wanted to see something better down the road.

“I need to see what’s over there...

I know there is something better down the road.”

“We walk into that which we cannot yet see.”<sup>1</sup>

There is an image of faith for you.

Those four fishermen who followed Jesus  
must have seen or heard or felt something  
that was so compelling they were willing to  
step out of what they knew - for something they did not know.

I want to talk a little about faith today.

A little about becoming disciples – like Simon and Andrew and James and John -  
but most about faith itself.

There are disciples - and there are disciples.  
Some disciples dedicate their lives to action -  
like the reformers – the saints of history –  
like those we talked about last week – Dr. King and Rosa Parks.

And there is James Lowery, the United Methodist minister  
who became a key figure in the civil rights movement.  
He gave the benediction at the inauguration on Tuesday.  
Did you know he is a United Methodist minister?

There are also many who think of themselves as disciples, or followers of Jesus,  
who simply live with the Christian story  
as a framework for thinking about the mystery of God –  
a place to start in thinking about what else is out there.  
Most of us are somewhere in between.  
We want to live our lives as fully as we can.  
And the teachings of Jesus become our guide.



I like what 'Frederick Buechner said about "calling."  
He said our calling is  
where our deepest gladness and the world's hunger meet -  
where our deepest gladness and the world's hunger meet.<sup>2</sup>  
We do want to find this – sometimes we describe it as "a calling."  
"What am I here for?"  
"Anybody out there care?"



Carl Sagen – the scientist - late in his life  
was interested in  
the “search for extraterrestrial intelligence.”  
That is a way to talk about searching for other beings out there in the universe  
who might be communicating with us – calling us.

Radio telescopes were set up – and still are  
and scientists listened – and still do - to radio waves throughout the universe  
to see if anyone was trying to communicate with Earth.

People asked him, “What if we never get any messages?”

“It’s a possibility,” Sagan said.

“But it’s a depressing thought to me - he said  
that there might be no one in the universe trying to call us.”



The Bible, of course, tells us that there is something in the universe calling us -  
that God does not stand apart - separate from us  
is not indifferent to us -  
and indeed tries to communicate with us -  
not like a person communicating with us -  
although we have traditionally talked about it that way.

Perhaps it is the big mind of the universe that is what we call God –  
and we like to relate to it as if it were a person.

We try to connect. We reach out in prayer.



For the Hebrew people life was always a leap of faith.

In fact, they interpreted their lives as related to the purposes of a greater being and purpose they called Yahweh.  
And they gave Yahweh human characteristics.

And life was almost always a “leap of faith.”  
And surely faith is still a leap of faith –  
when we try and join our deepest gladness with the world’s needs.



Sharon Salzberg is a teacher of eastern meditation.  
She writes about how we can grow in our faith.  
She teaches about bright faith, verified faith, and abiding faith.

Bright faith – she said – is pure optimism.  
Many children have bright faith.  
They cannot imagine that the world would not bend to their will.  
We tend to loose this somewhere or another.  
And when we do – we may move on to a verified faith.

Verified faith includes a memory that I have survived some things.  
I have achieved some things.  
It is a kind of learned wisdom.  
When I have a verified faith I can tolerate doubt.  
I know that doubt is not the opposite of faith.  
It is more like two sides of one coin.

The Buddha told a story that showed the movement  
from bright faith to verified faith.

He compared faith to a blind giant. Let's call the blind giant "Faith"  
who meets up with a very sharp-eyed cripple.

Let's call the cripple "Wisdom."

The blind giant, called Faith, says to the sharp-eyed cripple called Wisdom,

"I am very strong, but I can't see;

you are very weak, but you have sharp eyes.

Come and ride on my shoulders. Together we will go far.

So there we have bright faith and verified faith.

Somewhere along the way we might transform that into abiding faith.

Abiding faith circles them both and deepens them.

With abiding faith we don't expect life to remain stagnant.

We expect it to change. Abiding faith is like a tried and true friend.

It manifests in whatever way is effective in changing circumstances.

It is one with the flow of life.

With abiding faith we can leap into a new relationship,  
knowing that there may be someone more perfect out there,  
but this relationship feels good and right.

With abiding faith can leap out of a relationship,  
knowing that the grief and heartache is necessary to manifest a higher purpose.

With abiding faith we can leap into a new job or new career,  
or a change in location, knowing that the time is right.

With abiding faith can leap into retirement knowing that the shift  
will eventually give way to new opportunities.

Joseph Campbell spoke about abiding faith:  
“Jump. The chasm is not as wide as you think.”

Most of us move in and out of abiding faith.  
Sometimes we have it, and we like it when we do.  
And when we do – we want to move with it  
and let it energize us – wherever we go.

There is a prayer that goes with abiding faith.  
You can say these words from Psalm 46 to yourself:

Be still and know that I am God.

Be still and know that I am.

Be still and know.

Be still.

Be.

Be still my heart, even here I am at home.

Be still my heart, even here I am.

Be still my heart.

Be still.

Be.

And then jump.

Remember what Joseph Campbell says. The chasm is not as wide as you think.<sup>3</sup>

Faith – and calling – in life.

I told you about Dan Millman's little book *The Laws of Spirit* last week.

The traveler and the sage are on a mountain hike.

Remember the traveler's conversation with the sage -  
the woman who appeared to him on his hike.

This is what she says about the law of faith.

The law of faith is about trusting the inherent love and intelligence  
working through you and all creation.

She asked the traveler,

"What if you suddenly knew with certainty –  
that a higher intelligence was working through you –  
and everyone else for the highest good?"

What if you suddenly knew with certainty that there is indeed a purpose  
for every pleasure and hardship in your life?"

This traveler says, "If I knew that, it would make a difference."

The sage replies to the travel, "The law of faith doesn't require you to believe this.

But it guides you to live your life as if this were true."

And if you do this,

it will transform the way you experience the world.

It will transform the way your experience the world.

Well, that's not all the sage has to say about it,  
and it is certainly not all one might say  
about faith and calling in this life.  
But it is all the time I have right now talk about it.



I will close with a little more from Elizabeth Alexander's inaugural poem.

This would be an example of *abiding* faith.

“What if the mightiest word is love,  
love beyond marital, filial, and national -  
love that casts a widening pool of light -  
love with no need to preempt grievance.

In today's sharp sparkle - this winter air,  
anything can be made - any sentence begun.

On the brink, on the brim, on the cusp -  
praise song for walking forward in that light.

Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Excerpts from *Praise Song for the Day* by Elizabeth Alexander for the Inauguration of Barack Obama, Jan 20, 2009.

<sup>2</sup> The Sagan and Beuchner illustrations are adapted from Thomas Long, in a sermon entitled “Where You Never Expected to Be,” Oct. 27, 2006

<sup>3</sup> The Salzberg material on faith is adapted from Ian Lawton in a sermon entitled, “You Gotta Have Faith.”