

In the name of the Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier, Amen.

I say to you baptismal font to rise up and be cast into the Atlantic Ocean!

Hmm. Maybe I need to be more forceful.

Baptismal Font, I command you in the name of Jesus the Christ to rise up and be thrown into the Boston Harbor!

It's not listening to me. Would anyone else like to try! What if we all say it together, would our combined faith be enough to cast that baptismal font into the sea?

I doubt that even with all of us working together that this feat would be accomplished.

Does that mean that I and we do not have enough faith? We are all believing Christians, why can't we accomplish this task? Jesus says in the Gospel, that if we had faith the size of a mustard seed that we could say to the mulberry tree, "Be uprooted and planted in the sea" and it would obey us. In Matthew's gospel Jesus uses the size of a mustard seed of faith again but says that we could say to this mountain, "Move from here to there" and it would move, nothing would be impossible for you. These were seen in Jesus' time as well as ours today, impossible feats that nobody could accomplish.

Jesus used the word faith frequently in connection with people who were seeking healing, saying such things as your faith has healed you. Faith in this context very much implies power and authority to perform charismatic healings. One instance in Matthew when the disciples could not cast out an evil spirit from a boy, they ask Jesus why they couldn't do it, his reply, "Because of your little faith"

The word FAITH is used in the Synoptic Gospels = 29
Rest of the NT = 215

The Greek word used in the NT for faith is PISTIS which means: "TO BE TRUE, or be TRUSTWORTHY.

So, what then does it mean to have Faith?

Many of us in this society put our faith in things that we believe will meet our needs, wants and desires and keep us safe and secure. For example do we believe in the financial investments that we make hoping to achieve a future purchase or retirement? Do we place our trust in a governmental body to look out for our needs? Do we believe in the health care system or in fire and police agencies that are supposed to take care of us when a crisis arises? Do we have faith in our children, families and friends, employers?

We may typically put our trust in these institutions or personal relationships. But these are all examples of things that we encounter with our physical senses. We have had both positive and negative experiences with them, yet we continue to put our trust in them.

All of these are good and have their place, but they really don't define what faith is.

A common definition for faith that I like comes from Webster's Dictionary:

FAITH: Unquestioning belief that does not require proof or evidence.
Unquestioning belief in God. Complete trust, confidence, or reliance on a power greater than us – God.

I don't know about you, but I don't think that I would describe my faith in God as Unquestioning. Quite the contrary. I question God all the time – daily in fact.

I have learned that being in seminary creates that kind of atmosphere for questioning. All of my notions and beliefs about scripture, God, tradition and the church are all under the microscope to be challenged and rethought. It is hard work, but questioning and doubting is OK. As one of my seminary professors describes it – her job is to pull out everything that a seminarian currently thinks and believes about religion, shake it all up, dispel much of it and then add a bunch of new information and concepts blend it again and then help students put it all back together again so that their faith looks different coming out of seminary than it did coming in!

Paul would probably agree with this statement because for him, faith is very Dynamic.. Faith involves movement, progress. Faith is not something static or captured once and for all. I have to admit that when I recite the Nicene or apostles creed that this profession of faith often feels static or stagnant for me. It is something that I say, but it typically doesn't come alive for me.

So I am constantly striving for a renewed and increased faith just like the disciples in the gospel story today. In fact, the totality of our lives must be based on such faith in God. Of course we all have what may be called deficiencies of faith, but no matter what our measure of faith is currently, we are called to follow it and persevere no matter what comes our way.

White, educated, privileged people like me typically tend to think about and rationalize faith. We frequently engage the world with theories and conceptualizations of God and spend time with intellectual conversations about what we think faith is.

Believing is a great deal more than claiming a set of propositions, it is rather staking our life on something. If we really believe something, we will feel it, and if we really feel something, we will do something about it.

Take for example our individual realities.

I quite my job, sold my house and said good-bye to friends and neighbors after 22 years of life in Cincinnati in order to attend seminary, go into debt and face an unsure future. As all seminarians quickly learn, there is no guarantee that we will be ordained at the end

of this academic degree. Our bishops and commissions on ministry can stall or stop any hope of being ordained at any point in this process. Given this reality, some of my Cincinnati acquaintances couldn't grasp why in the world I would embark on this venture.

All of you sitting here this morning have chosen to attend St. John's today. What are your reasons for coming? Why do you participate in church at all? Have you ever articulated those reasons to your family, friends, neighbors, co-workers or yourself? I would venture to say that there will be different circumstances and stories, but the underlying foundation for all of us is - FAITH.

We are all striving to achieve that dynamic, personal experience of a God that we cannot see, touch or hear. We have no hard evidence or proof that God is among and with us. Yet we put our trust and confidence in the Divine.

FAITH is about Authentic Experiences, not a semantic reading, expert knowledge or intellectualizing of the texts.

FAITH is about the importance of believing and feeling and the centrality of a deep experiential relation to God.

An IMPLICIT faith grows from events and practices shared with others. That is why we need each other in community. The language of faith is frequently unexplainable. The words come from the heart and are not easily quantified— I feel close to God, I trust, I believe, I just know it.

When the apostles asked Jesus to increase their faith, he stressed the nature of faith rather than its quantity. Christian faith is trust, openness and commitment to God. To have this kind of faith at all is to open up infinite possibilities for life. Faith is not a magic charm for moving mountains or trees. But rather it is a channel through which God's infinite power may flow. Jesus told the apostles that the way to have their faith increased was to act in terms of the faith they already had.

Christian FAITH is a way of life, not merely a view of life.

When was the last time you questioned your faith?

