

St. David's Presbyterian Church  
St. John's, NL  
"The Power of Faith"  
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Faith is as important a discussion as any you will ever have anywhere. In fact, it probably merits a full book length discussion. For that reason, I almost called today's sermon "Faith Book," but I didn't.

Faith for many people is an amorphous, ambiguous gas like substance that some people have and others simply don't. It is often used in conversations both inside the church and outside it in referring to specific individuals, saying something like, "She has a lot of faith. Or, he doesn't have much faith at all." By that, a person will mean that the other person is religious or goes to church or is interested in spiritual discussions, or not. But the word "faith" in the Scriptures we read today is much more concrete. It is clear and it is at the centre of both what Jesus says in the Gospel of Luke, chapter 12 and what the author of Hebrews says in the Hall of Fame chapter, chapter 11. We'll get to that, first the word.

*Pistis*, the Greek noun is often translated in the New Testament with the word "faith." That's the word which is used over and over in Hebrews 11. It can mean "belief" or "faith." "Believe" is one of those words in English that has come to mean "that to which we give intellectual assent." "I believe in God," thus establishes that I accept that there is a divine being of some kind. Or, as an example, "I believe in aliens," meaning that I receive the thesis that other beings from other planets have visited earth, or simply that they are out there. I'm not saying I believe in aliens, I'm just trying to work with you on this word "believe." A belief is not something you have to stake your life on. Many people say they believe in God and in Jesus but never go to church, have few activities or attitudes that might be considered Christian, yet they state their intellectual preference or philosophical position.

So here's what I do to help me when I read or translate "pistis" into English. I use one of the other most common definitions of the word, which is "trust." Whenever I read the word faith, I translate it trust, or even more importantly what happens in English and I think in most other languages is that we immediately ask who or what we are trusting. In the Scriptures, it is trusting

Jesus or trusting God. Now listen again to Hebrews 11, when the English word "faith" is replaced with "trusting God." *Read Hebrews 11: 1-6*

Now we understand that faith is not some nebulous thing that some people have lots of, and some don't. Neither is faith "belief" as it is commonly used to simply give intellectual agreement to an idea. It is a profound trust in the One who holds the universe.

Trusting someone means taking a risk. Trusting someone means being vulnerable before them. If I trust this person, will they validate my trust in them or will they hurt me in some way? Will they violate my trust? This is a key component in any relationship, friendship, marriage, business partnership, leader/follower contract in a voluntary or non-voluntary context. You hear it said in some movies and other contexts, "Don't trust anyone." If you do that in fact, you have no real relationship with anyone. It is only in trusting that depth occurs in any relationship. And when trust is violated that depth is compromised, even the relationship itself can be compromised.

So when we are called to faith in God, we are called to trust Him. It's exactly what we read in *Living Faith 6.1.1* "*Faith is trust in God, involves personal repentance of sin, acceptance of Jesus Christ as Saviour, and commitment to Him as Lord.* It also includes belief: "*Faith includes assent to the truth of the Gospel.*" And it is so much more as *Living Faith* continues: "*By faith we receive the very life of God into our lives and joyfully discover that God knows, loves, and pardons us.*"

Trusting Jesus, that is all, is what the hymn says. We're going to sing it in a few minutes. But what do you do when you find it hard to trust? How do you open yourself to trust or indeed increase your trust in someone? That is the key faith question. You see how unambiguous it is. It's not simply random. It draws us back to the central reflections of life: Will I yield to God's point of view on this matter? Will I choose to risk trusting him for this important decision in my life? Will I involve Him in this new relationship I am pursuing? Or not. These are the faith questions that are not vague, but quite specific.

In the end, we all look for the grace to receive what God says as true. For example, that the Gospel truth that Jesus really is the way, the truth and the life, ...And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to Him, or draws near to him must faith that he exists... we must

faith him. That's what Hebrews 11: 6 says. Your Bible probably says something like "we must believe that he exists," because we don't use "faith" as a verb in English, but this belief that the author is talking about is not simply an intellectual excursion, it is a staking of your life upon him. That's why that verse concludes with not only believing, *faithing*, that he exists, but also that he rewards those who earnestly seek him. God wants us to stake our lives on Him.

You've probably heard of Blaise Pascal who wrote in the 1600s as a mathematician, scientist and religious philosopher. He talked about how we spend our lives as a wager. Let me expand on his idea: We only have the one life to spend, we are there at the casino of life, we have to bet. How are you going to bet? Are you going to put all your chips on God or are you going to hold back and wait and see how it goes? Will your Christianity be just a small bet, just a bumper sticker on the car of life? Or will you not trust him at all or even say that he does not exist and hold your heart back from him?

Some theologies today are encouraging people to no longer think of God as a person whom we are to trust, but rather as some abstract principle. But the Scriptures over and over go to the core of the matter and say that we must bet our lives on him.

That's what Abraham did in Genesis 15. He left everything familiar and listened to a person he hadn't previously known. He had grown up with his father's gods, but now he was trusting the Lord. He went to a strange place, with no child and no future that he could see as he and his wife could not conceive. All he had was the promise of God. And he based his life on that, and God called that right, righteousness. So Abraham's faith was visible by where he lived and how he moved. Some of us, perhaps many of us know what it is like to move somewhere completely different, just trusting God. And here we are.

Hebrews says we are resident aliens in this world, just like Sarah and Abraham, looking for a better country—God's country, the permanent, eternal place. That's what Hebrews 11: 16 says. And because they trusted him, he wasn't ashamed to be called their God, for there is a city prepared for them and everyone who trusts God.

And we trust God like the Psalmist, who says military might and martial arts only go so far. Trusting God goes farther.

And Jesus asks us the heart searching question, whether we will be found trusting God when he returns. Will we be engaged in activities that reflect our faith when he comes, or our lack of faith? Will we be growing in our trust in God, or shrinking away from that trust?

I asked earlier how we deepen our trust in someone else. May I suggest that it happens simply as we choose to spend time with the One about whom I am talking. When we make God and his Book a major part of our lives, when we begin to be the persons He wants us to be and do the things He wants us to do, then we live out the trust that we say we have.

Not sure if you trust Him? Now, today is a good day to put all your chips on God's space. It is a good time to say to Him, "I'm not sure how to trust you more, but I deeply want to do so. Take this life of mine and use it as Your own. Let me be the extension of your hands and feet, your thoughts and feelings, your love and compassion."

The power of faith is the connection we make with the Source of Life, the greatest energy source, trusting Him for His best, glorifying and enjoying Him forever and reaping the benefits of this marvelous relationship.

Let us pray.