

December 6, 2015  
Luke 1: 26-38

Faith

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Like ocean wave after wave coming up on shore, terrorism keeps coming at us. "Be afraid" may be the central theme of our time. Movies like "World War Z" and TV shows like the "Walking Dead" and "Revolution" reflect fears that civilization is ending. Fear, like darkness, spreads across our land.

Now fear can squeeze people dry of love, compassion, mercy and forgiveness. It can tempt folks to roll up in a ball like little "rolly-poly" bugs, or despair and cease to be themselves. Into these times, Jesus is born as our hope and unquenchable light. Yet how to believe when faith is not proof? For according to Hebrews 11:1: "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."

Well many have been raised on faith in God Triune, believing scriptures are true. Others less convinced by scripture alone may have had an experience of God in nature or through loving relationships or in other ways that validate what they read in scripture. Still others here may see the whole idea of faith and belief as a gamble.

When my Mom married my Presbyterian Dad, she was an agnostic. A chemistry major at Duke University, she had left her faith behind. So when he wanted her to go to church with him, after some thought, she told me she decided to give it a try. She reasoned that if Jesus is son of God and Savior then she gained everything. On the other hand, if none of it was true then she lost nothing.

Decades later in a theology discussion group at Vanderbilt Divinity School, many there reasoned we could not have faith as there was no proof. Though I no longer had "left-brain" proof either, my epiphany in class that day was faith in God and Jesus as son and savior is a choice, not proof. For me, the proof continues to be my experiences of God at "gut" level. I choose to believe Jesus frees us from the chains of fear, healing our brokenness with love and forgiveness and offering us new lives with him as companion and guide - now and after death.

It is Puddleglum in CS Lewis' children's book *The Silver Chair* who best answers "why faith" for me. For those who have not read this book in the Narnia series, Puddleglum is a tall frog-like marshwiggle sent by Aslan with two children, Jill and Eustace, to find King Caspian's son Rillian. After a green worm attacked and killed his mother, he disappears on his search to find and kill it. We later discover this same witch kidnaps Rillain as part of her plot to overthrow Narnia. Yet as in

most fairy tales, her spell has a flaw. Rillian must be tied to a silver chair for an hour a day for be free forever.

After many adventures, Jill and Eustace and Puddleglum find themselves in the witch's underground kingdom. Left with a silly man who seems not quite right, he bids them hide in another room before gnomes come to tie him to the silver chair. He cautions them not to heed his words when bound. So when he calls out to them to free him in Aslan's name, the last sign Aslan gave Jill to identify Rillian, they cut him free. Rillian, now fully himself, destroys the silver chair with his sword just before the witch enters the room.

The witch sees the chair and is very angry indeed. She throws a handful of green powder into roaring fire, picks up her lyre, and begins to strum while she chastens them with melodic voice. Rillian stiffly responds, "Madam, you will be happy to know I am free, thanks to these children and marsh wiggle Aslan sent. Now we will take our leave." She laughs, asking, "Where will you go as my underground kingdom is the only true reality?" Using symbols like lamp for sun and cat for Aslan to explain to her their reality, she answers, "Surely you are too old for such games of make-believe." All the while the green smoke fills the room, the strumming fills their heads, and they slowly sink under her spell.

Desperate times call for desperate measures. Puddleglum steps over to the fireplace and stomps out the flames with his cold-blooded frog feet. "There is nothing more invigorating than the smell of burnt marshwiggle" remarks Lewis. Puddleglum then turns to the furious witch and says, "You're may be right, I shouldn't wonder. It may be there is no other world than this underground kingdom of yours. But our make-believe world beats your world all hollow. So if it is all the same to you, we are leaving now to go out and look for it or die trying."

In a world full of fear, Jesus says "Be not afraid." To the girl asked to bear the son of God, Gabriel first says, "Be not afraid." Though we have no proof outside our experiences that God is love, sending son Jesus to save us from fear and darkness, I personally choose Jesus in faith. If the stories of His healings of those sick in body, mind, and spirit are true then the darkness of terrorism has no more power over us now than the Romans had over those who chose to believe in Jesus then. For what Jesus offers is a place in God's world here and now, a world of light and love in the midst of the darkness and violence in our world.

Now Jesus returns to us again this Advent, offering us his peace to lighten our hearts with hope and love. The same world Jesus brings of love and hope is ours, here and now, for the asking. The password at the door is “faith”. Speak “faith”, and enter all who desire to live without fear in the unquenchable light of Christ’s love.