

Faithfulness | Galatians 5:22 & Hebrews 11:1, 39-12:2 | 25 February 2018

May His lovingkindness draw us into a childlike relationship of tender trust, dazzling faith and anticipative belief, where His wonder and beauty delight us, awaken us, and prompt the never ending “Again, Daddy, Again!”

Richard Foster and James Bryan Smith, Editors, *Devotional Classics*, (Harper San Francisco, 1990, revised 2005). Article by Kathleen Norris, *Finding Faith in the Mundane*.

Kathleen Norris (1947-) writes deeply about spirituality in earthly and everyday ways. She has lived and worked in several places (South Dakota, Honolulu, Vermont, New York City). She served as the arts administrator at the Academy of American Poets. Her first published work was a book of poetry, titled *Falling Off* (1971). Not long after she moved to her grandparents’ house in South Dakota and has lived there ever since. It is there that she wrote the award-winning best-seller, *Dakota: A Spiritual Geography*... The following excerpt comes from, *The Quotidian Mysteries*, a unique and eloquent little book about *finding the fabric of faith in the mundane*. In it she writes incarnationally about the spiritual significance of doing the dishes and the laundry. 363

It is difficult for adults to be so at play with daily tasks in the world. What we do of necessity can drag us down, and all too often the repetitive and familiar become not occasions for renewal, but dry, stale, lifeless activity. When washing dishes, I am no better than anyone else at converting the drudgery of the work into something better by means of playful abandon. The contemplative in me recognizes the sacred potential in the mundane task, even as the terminally busy go-getter resents the necessity of repetition. But, as Soren Kierkegaard reminds us, “Repetition is reality, and it is the seriousness of life . . . repetition is the daily bread which satisfies with benediction.” Repetition is both as ordinary and necessary as bread, and the very stuff of ecstasy. 365

I once observed a girl of about four years of age find a penny on the floor of a post office. “Look, Momma, a penny,” she said. Her mother, busy with the clerk at the window, mumbled an acknowledgement. I was surprised to see the girl put the penny back on the floor, in a different location. “Look, Momma,” she said again, “I found another one!” She kept it up until she had found five pennies, and each one of them new. 365

The wisdom of that child is difficult for grownups to retain... It was in the play of writing a poem that I first became aware that the demands of laundry might have something to do with God’s command that we worship, that we sing praise on a regular basis. Both laundry and worship are repetitive activities with a potential for tedium, and I hate to admit it, but laundry often seems like the more useful of the tasks. But both are the work that God has given us to do. 366

Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence*

Faithfulness. The word here is *pistis*, Paul’s normal word for “faith,” having to do with one’s basic stance toward God of utter trust in his trustworthiness. But in the LXX it was the basic Greek word for translating the concept of God’s faithfulness. This is the sense that Paul picks up in Rom 3:3, that the “unfaithfulness” of God’s people does not call into question God’s own *pistis* (“faithfulness”). Thus, even though one would have no theological objection to “faith” as the meaning of the word even here—i.e., that one of the fruit of the Spirit is one’s trust in God—it is more likely, given the other virtues, and especially those that immediately surround it, that Paul is referring to faithfulness, i.e., one’s faithful living out one’s trust in God over the long haul. 451

The more difficult question, given the context, is whether it also carries a nuance of faithfulness in relationship to others. Since there are no other NT examples of this usage, it seems unlikely, despite the context, that Paul had that in mind here. More likely the sense is that of faithful devotion to God, which in turn will express itself toward others by means of the various other fruit in this list. True “faith” for Paul always includes the element of “faithfulness”; and thus true “faith” for him in this sense, as a fruit of the Spirit, expresses itself in love (5:6). 451

Faith = *pistis*

NIDNTT, Vol. 1

Classical Greek. This group of terms represents a broad spectrum of ideas. It is used to express relations between man and man, and also to express relationship with the divine. 595

Old Testament Concept of Faith. In Hebrew the root **‘aman** means to be true, reliable, faithful. It can be applied to men (Moses, Num 12:7; servants, 1 Sam 22:14; a witness, Isa 8:2; a messenger, Prov 25:13; prophets, 1 Sam 3:20). But it can also be applied to God himself who keeps his covenant and gives grace to those who love him (Deut 7:9). Particular stress is laid on the word of God (or men) preserving its dependability and being confirmed by subsequent action (1 Ki 8:26; 1 Chron 17:23 ff.; in the case of men, Gen 42:20). 595-596

A related idea is expressed by the root **batah** (LXX Greek is **elpizo** = hope) with the meaning to trust, rely upon... Later the Hebrew root **batah** was assimilated in meaning to the root **‘aman**. Basic for the OT idea of faith are the statements of Ex 4:1-9, 27-31. 596

“Faithfulness” and “faith” stand here close together in the Hebrew term **munah**. The idea is that of unwavering hold of the word of God against all contrary appearances... To sum up, it may be said that [faithfulness and faith] describe a living act of trust in the OT, and also the dimension of human existence in a historical situation. The group of words does not step outside the realm of the personal. Special stress is laid on the future goal. The past was the starting-point but not the goal of trust. The whole emphasis falls on overcoming the opposition of the ungodly and the realization of the divine purpose. Above all, it is clear in the prophets that faith must pass through extreme need and judgment, before it attains its goal in the salvation that lies in the future. 597

New Testament. The NT use of the **pistis** (noun), **pisteuo** (verb) word-group involves in the first instance the further development of the OT and Jewish tradition and the questions peculiar to it. The frequent use of **pisteuo eis**, “believe in” (Gal 2:16; Jn 1:12; 3:18), in the vocabulary of mission, is a striking departure from ordinary Greek and the LXX... They involve the incorporation of a specific, historical content into the Christological confession. “Repentance from dead works” and “faith in God” were important elements in the teaching of the primitive Christian catechism (Heb 6:1). More important is the pointed use of **pistis** in the context of Pauline theology to denote the reception of Christian proclamation and the saving faith which was called forth by the gospel (Rom 1:8; 1 Thess 1:8). For Paul **pistis** is indissolubly bound with proclamation. Early Christian missionary preaching thus brought faith into sharp focus. 599

Jesus and the Synoptic Tradition. The miracle stories often contain reference to the faith of the sick person or those around him (Mk 2:5; 5:34, 36; 10:52; Mat 8:10). What is meant is trust in the mission of Jesus and his power to deliver from trouble. These saving acts are performed in the service of his commission and are intended to confirm an existing faith. The question of faith is clearly bound up with these miracle stories. Jesus did not only seek to deliver people from physical need, but to make men

witnesses of his saving work. It is not a matter of making a condition upon which he will act. Rather, he is concerned with the goal beyond the physical process. His intention was not to be a mere “healer”, but to be a helper in God’s name. He was therefore more concerned to ask for faith than to demand it. Man’s trust presents the possibility for God to do his work. It is thus only a start and a first step to what was to be declared later by the Hellenistic [Greek] church. 600

Faith in God means for Jesus being open to the possibilities that God presents (Mk 11:12), “*have faith in God.*” It also involves a reckoning with God which is not simply content with the thing given and the events that have come about... It must not be forgotten that every summons and statement of Jesus contained the elements of faith, trust, knowledge, decision, obedience and self-direction. The preaching of Jesus cannot be understood apart from the many-sided aspects of faith and trust. The faith of Jesus was directed towards reality. It was deeply involved in the act of living, and was on a completely different plane from hypothetical abstractions. 600-601

Paul and the Pauline Tradition. Paul’s teaching presupposes a continuity with the teaching of the Palestinian Jewish and the Hellenistic church. His calling by the risen Lord led him to grapple with the particular questions raised by the churches. 601

For Paul, Gal 5:6 suggests a fixed formula: “*For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is of any avail, but faith working through love*” (cf. 6:15; 1 Cor 7:19). The notion of being “weak” in faith (Rom 14:1) introduces a particular discuss. It is bound up with making critical judgments. Paul does not evade this. For there is such a thing as growth in faith (2 Cor 10:15), steadfastness in faith (1 Cor 15:58), and self-critical examination as to whether one’s own attitude springs from faith (cf. the important statement in Rom 14:23 “*But whoever has doubts is condemned if he eats, because the eating is not from faith. For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.*” All these exhortations starkly show how faith is not only exposed to critical judgment, but submits itself repeatedly to it. The fact that the gospel finds its ultimate expression and foundation in the cross of Christ means that faith must constantly measure itself by this norm. Faith is dynamic movement which involves adjustment and self-adjustment. In this respect also the situation corresponds to the doctrine of the Spirit. 602

Hebrews represents an independent tradition of teaching. It makes extensive use of OT motifs, and draws upon the history of the patriarchs in connection with words of the *pistis*-group. In its exhortation, Hebrews takes up the promise of faith and the warning against unbelief (Heb 10:37 f., see Hab 2:3 f.). Above all, Heb 11:1 presents an instructive definition which combines OT and Hellenistic motifs: “*Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen*” (RSV). This is not a comprehensive summary of all the elements in faith, but of those which were fundamental for a church under persecution: assurance of what is hoped for and conviction of being led by what cannot be seen. The future and what is hidden from view are here closely connected. This definition introduces the survey of patriarchal history in ch. 11 and the picture of the NT church in 12:1-11. Jesus Christ appears as the “pioneer and perfecter of our faith” (Heb 12:2). He has been made perfect by God and can now bring the struggle for perfection to its conclusion. AS those given the promise, the people of God are charged with acting upon faith. 604

Ester Lightcap Meek, *Loving to Know.*

Making Sense of Commitment and Faith. At the outset Polanyi’s proposals gave me a way to make ordinary human sense of faith and commitment. These had been, for me, “religious” terms that I didn’t know how to unpack epistemically, whose opacity threatened to render my whole Christianity suspect. Commitment figures large in Polanyi’s “fiduciary programme.” It involves the knower’s exercising

responsibility to own the truth he or she claims, not as over against reality, but in deference to it. Luther's ringing "Here I stand; I cannot do otherwise" Polanyi cites as expressing the act of upholding any truth claim by exercising great personal responsibility, yet simultaneously being compelled by submission to reality. Polanyi's alternative vision of knowing daringly espouses the normative and existential dimensions of knowing. 169-170

But Polanyi makes it clear that what commitment refers to is our "manner of disposing ourselves," our personal assimilation whereby we press a tool or a framework into subsidiary service, indwelling it to extend ourselves in pursuit of the yet-to-be-known... Commitment refers to the clues we indwell subsidiarily in pursuit of a focal pattern. In other words, faith is of a piece with keeping your balance on a bike, and thus quite ordinary. Faith just is what we do in knowing. Belief is the epistemic act. But it is a lived body feel of a tool or framework indwelt with confidence. 170

I felt that understanding this made all the difference regarding understanding my Christianity, justifying it to myself, and reconciling it to all human enterprises. Polanyi shows how commitment always involves my lived body. And since, for Polanyi, commitment, as indwelling subsidiaries [i.e. *everything* past, present and future related to one's life], is essential to all knowing, it is part and parcel of "reason," rather than opposed to it. My indwelling Scripture to understand God and the world certainly fits this description. All this also challenged my own defective default understanding of human knowing by making commitment, faith, palpable as subsidiarily embodied. 170

There's something else in Polanyi's proposals that also deserves to be called faith or commitment. He paints a graphic and indisputable picture of the scientist in pursuit of the as-yet undiscovered reality. Polanyi raises the philosophically awkward matter of the ancient Meno Dilemma, posed millennia ago by Plato, in a dialogue by that name, it has never satisfactorily been answered in the western tradition. How do you come to know? For either you do or you don't know something. If you don't know it, you cannot begin to move toward knowing it; and if you do know it, you don't need to move toward knowing it. Plato used this to set up his suggestion that all learning is recalling. But this did not really resolve the dilemma. Aristotle sidestepped the dilemma by concentrating, not on coming to know (discovery), but on explanation. Most of western philosophy has tried to make do with these less than satisfying alternatives. It is a wonder, really, not to mention a radical challenge to philosophy, that scientific discovery has actually nevertheless taken place at a great rate. 170-171

Polanyi successfully solves the Meno dilemma about how coming to know is possible. He gives an account of anticipative knowledge, of being on the way to knowing. We can half-know something, or almost know something, or implicitly know something. And we can do these without explicitly knowing *that* we do, or knowing *what* we know correctly about it. Clues are the primary example. Something is a clue and operates as such only in advance of our accurate grasp of its import, and of its confirmation as integral to the solution. Polanyi shows how, to avail ourselves of clues, we tacitly, subsidiarily, shift to interpret the clues from the standpoint, the rationality, of the as-yet-unidentified reality, in anticipation of what we do not yet know. This is a common, yet uncommon experience. For Polanyi, the research scientist, this alone allows any scientific discovery to occur. Western philosophy, he perceived, had never furnished the requisite account. Polanyi's rich account of tacit knowing as both subsidiary and anticipative uniquely makes sense of it. 85-86

NOTE: I find this to be a deep and rich understanding of walking/living by faith into a life abundantly more than what I can even imagine!