

Faith... does mean many things. Jesus once said “Ye of *little* faith” to his disciples... and at another time he said, “If they had faith even the size of a mustard seed, they could move mountains.” And I’ll never forget the cardiologist, who, noting that my elevated blood pressure was most likely due to nerves and anxiety, challenged me to have a little more faith! He then quoted the gospel story of healing a boy with seizures, and the father who said, “I believe, but help my unbelief. (Yes, it’s natural to have faith with some doubts) So “Help, O Lord, our unbelief.” You’ll see that line in our final hymn.

So let’s consider faith. Faith can be a specific word, such as Christian Faith or Muslim Faith or Jewish faith, etc. In the religious sense, we might say “Keep *the* faith.” But faith can also be a common secular word. Have more faith can simply mean “Have more hope, have more trust.” There are synonyms for many religious words; Faith is indeed like *Hope* or *Trust*. We all put trust or hope in something or somebody. We may put faith in the stock market. Sometimes we put our faith in a very trustworthy person; In spiritual community, we put faith in God or in Christ, to walk with us, when it seems that we are alone.

A very common use of the word Faith is that often in life we take a “Leap of Faith...” all throughout life, when we try something new... we hope and trust that things will go well. It’s a leap of faith to go the first day to any new school. It’s a leap of faith in adolescence to call someone for a date. It’s a leap of faith after high school to start a job, or to choose a major in college. Surely it is a leap of faith to get married; does anyone really know what they are getting into?!

So Abraham is famous for taking a leap of faith. He left his city and his family at age 75 and went to an unknown land (Well, he did

take his wife Sarah and his nephew Lot with him). In the New Testament letter to the Hebrews, Ch 11, Abraham is praised for his faith, to follow the leading from the spirit of God, to go out “not knowing where he was to go.” Many other Biblical characters are praised in Hebrews Ch 11 for their faith. Noah, was warned of the upcoming floods, events yet unseen; With faith, he constructed an ark. By faith, Abraham settled in a new land, living in tents. By faith, Moses was hid for 3 months by his parents, after Pharaoh’s decree to kill the Hebrew baby boys. By faith, young man Moses, who was raised in Pharaoh’s household, refuses his royalty, and chooses to protect a Hebrew slave who was being beaten. By faith, Moses later led his people across the Sea of Reeds, then through a wilderness and finally to an unknown promised land.

So faith is a hope or trust in an unknown, unseen future, and moving into that unknown, trusting there will be goodness and new life. Because the future is always unknown to us, moving forward in faith is always one step at a time, or as 12 step programs say, one day at a time!

Faith, or Hope and trust in God, begs the question of *how* God might speak to us... how can God guide us, lead us... into our next steps. I love the opening lines of our hymn “Lead Kindly Light”... “I do not ask to see the distant scene; one step is enough for me.” Such leading or guidance could be called “intuition.” It could even be as simple as a “hunch.” Spiritual guidance can also take the form of “confirmation” by others (when some hunch or intuition we have is confirmed by other around us, it can be a kind of sign to us.)

In the community of faith we also use the word “calling” for this unseen but spiritual sense of something we feel we need to do. Every minister is asked how (or how-on-earth!) did you wind up with ministry as your main vocation in life, so we have a “call story.” I

always mention being drawn to the stillness of prayer and meditation, the beauty of worship, the peacefulness of worship in a world with too much stress. I also always mention working in a nursing home as an aide, being drawn to hearing the life stories of the elderly, more than the medical aspects of their care.

We all have callings, that can change at various stages of our lives. Many people of faith say that our calling is the place where our gifts and skills meet the needs of the world. I often wondered how my gift at speaking Spanish could dovetail with ministry. I spent time with the Pentecostal church of Chile facilitating the relationship between them and the Massachusetts Conference of the UCC. But I always also thought... when I get more time, how can I help Spanish speakers in *this* country?

I think I just got a calling; this week I was at a meeting at the U.U. church in which we discussed how we can deal with the cruelty now being directed toward immigrants. One subgroup has been making trips to Burlington where there is a large detention center. There is much pain there... due to family separations, and lack of mercy even for those trying to go through our court system, (which is so backlogged it has waiting times of years!) The need was expressed that they need more chaplains there to give comfort, resources when possible, and pray with those coming and going. There are distressed families waiting outside, or even guards who are upset about the job they have to do. It was said that they need chaplains who speak Spanish. So, being both a minister and former Spanish teacher, my hand started going up almost automatically. I could do no other than offer some help. It will be a move in faith, stepping into the unknown, but also trusting in a the unseen God and Spirit who will give me healing words to say with whomever I meet. I will trust also the Spirit of wisdom to do only as much as is

safe, follow the limitations set by the guards there, and to do or say all with a spirit of nonviolence.

In conclusion, faith is about moving ahead in life, often into the unknown, taking a leap of faith, even one step at a time. But faith is also trusting that the One who created us and gave us an intuition, who called us to use our gifts and talents will be with us, walk with us, be God-with-us, yes, an “unseen” yet felt Presence, a God who is present in many ways. I did write a song about faith awhile back; it describes a God of many names, a God in Christ, in Holy Spirit, who is present and available in all our life’s challenges and leaps of faith.

KEEP THE FAITH, by Ross Varney

1. Where is God, we want to know. Why do answers come so slow? God is here, although not seen, in our hearts and in our dreams. God is Trust in Love’s Way, and Hope for each new day, God is present every hour, as Grace and Healing power!

Chorus: Let’s keep the faith, let God in. Let in goodness and Light. Live in Hope, Live in trust, God is Love and New Life!

2. When the sun cannot be seen we still know that it is there. When the Wind cannot be seen, we still feel it everywhere. God is Love, God is Truth, and the power to set free, So keep the faith in Holy Spirit, who lives in you and me! **(Chorus.)**

3. We would like a crystal ball, we want answers for it all. But the word that we hear is “Be patient, God is near.” We hear of Goodness and Mercy and Gold to refine, so take it one day, even one step, one step at a time. **(Chorus.)**

Amen.