

08 August 2010

## Why Be a Person of Faith?

Rev. Rusty Butler

Scripture: Luke 18:1-8

I have some trepidation entering into this sermon. I mean, it seems like the answer has got to be in the affirmative. If I don't come out there, I risk losing you all and having Valerie come back next week to an empty church wondering what the heck happened! It seems like I've got to come out strong the other way doesn't it...but I want to take the argument seriously. Many people are not people of faith and they have valid and good reasons for it.

This week I was going to show you some different videos of people of faith doing well there is no other way to put doing what I think are crazy things. I found a video of a church that takes that text in the last part of the Gospel of Mark about the ones who believe will pick up snakes in their hands and if they drink any deadly thing it will not hurt them. You can just go to youtube and take a gander at that..people drinking strychnine and handling those vipers and rattlesnakes...just crazy.

Then there are people like Fred Phelps and the Westboro Baptist church, they picket the funerals of servicemen and women and just act completely inappropriately trying to make their case about homosexuality. They consider themselves people of faith.

Of course there are the fundamentalists in every religion, who have caused so much heartache and rupture and violence in the world that we could do without that kind of faith.

We all know where the faithful in the church failed...burning witches, torturing people to confess in order to get them to confess to believing in Jesus Christ, waging holy wars all done under the guise of being faithful.

There is every reason to wonder whether or not a person should be a person of faith. There's plenty on that side of the ledger that would say, don't do it.

People make the decision all the time. They weigh what they see and they decide, "No that is not going to be for me." Some of you have probably heard of the author Anne Rice...she writes stories about vampires and angels and those kinds of books...a couple of weeks ago she announced that she was done being a Christian. She said she was still going to follow Jesus but she was renouncing Christianity. She said she refuses to be anti-gay, anti-feminist, anti birth control, anti-secular humanist, anti-science and anti-life.

She is rejecting a particular expression of the Christian faith.

Adam Hamilton, the pastor of the Church of the Resurrection wrote, "Once, I had a parishioner write me after an encounter with a particularly obnoxious Christian saying, "Pastor Adam, from this day on I will no longer call myself a Christian. I don't want to be associated with people like this man. I don't want others to think I see the world like he sees it. I am a follower of Jesus, but I don't want to be known as a Christian any more.

I understand that you probably do too. I was at Barnes and Noble recently picking up a book and I was standing in the stacks, trying to

find the one I wanted and I heard a woman go up to one of the clerks in the middle of the store and ask, “does this store have a gay and lesbian section?” The young woman employee said, “Yes, it’s small but it can found in the Cultural Studies section of the store...would you like me to show you where it is?” The woman, about my age, said, “No, I just wanted to know whether or not you had one.” I thought to myself that’s interesting...just noted it...but then I watched the woman march through the store and as she was approaching the door to let her and her 15/16 year old daughter out, she looked at the clerk checking people out and fired off a remark about, “I’ve been to 6 different stores to find a Christian CD...and no one has it...”

I thought, oh she is not giving Christians a very good name. When I went to buy my book I tried to be especially kind, tried to make up for it you know. But I think the damage might have already been done.

There are valid reasons not to be people of faith. We all know that.

But on the other side of the ledger, there is the weight of evidence starting from the beginning of the Biblical texts suggesting that it is good to be a person of faith.

Jesus spoke about faith numerous times, you remember,

The Centurian in the book of Matthew comes to Jesus asking him to heal his servant, Jesus says I’ll come to your house and cure him, but the Centurian says, just say the words and he will be healed, Jesus says of the Centurian, truly I tell you in no one in Israel have I seen such faith.

In many of the healing stories, the stories end with the formula, Go your faith has made you well.

**You remember the parable of the mustard seed, If you have faith the size of a mustard seed you will say to this mountain move from here to there and it will move and nothing will be impossible for you.**

**In the third ending to the gospel of Mark, Jesus comes down hard on the disciples for their lack of faith.**

**Paul says we walk by faith and not by sight, and we are justified by faith and so it goes...on and on throughout the gospels and the epistles. Faith is simply a foundational idea in the gospels. It certainly seems that Jesus thinks it's a good idea.**

**Faith cannot be what is alluded to in that famous dialogue in *Alice in Wonderland* where**

**"Alice laughed: "There's no use trying," she said; "one can't believe impossible things." "I daresay you haven't had much practice," said the Queen. "When I was younger, I always did it for half an hour a day. Why, sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast." *Alice in Wonderland*.**

**Faith can't be believing impossible things. That just doesn't cut it for many of us.**

**Our of our people wrote this on my facebook page...I thought it was very good...Faith gives me purpose, peace, compassion/empathy, a love deeper than myself. and a connection to those around me, even if they have different beliefs**

**Who do we let define for us faith?**

**Maybe we all need to do that for ourselves.**

To be a person of faith means to bind oneself to the past, but not let the past dictate what the future will be, it is to pledge one's self to a better future through our work, our rest, our play. It's to be a part of a community that if I were left alone to choose who would be in and who would be out of it, would not choose these same people.

It is to grow in the midst of the slogging it out, to try and become deeper and wider in thought, and action, compassion, kindness.

People of faith and people of no faith have both made a difference in the world. People of faith try and do it together, sometimes for better and sometimes for worse. But just the fact that they are doing it together gives them a sense they are not alone in the universe in the living of our days. And maybe at the very core of it, that might be what being a person of faith means...knowing that you are not going it alone.

Well something to think about in these days. Amen.