

# “Faith and Curiosity”

Homilies preached by Ben Hall (with Matt Flaherty)

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## I. Why have faith?

Why do we have faith? Because we are broken. Yes, we are broken. In the midst of our victories and our joys, we carry wounds. Some wounds are superficial scrapes. Some are to the bone. Some are deeper still: to the heart, to the soul, so deep we can't even comprehend where they came from, or when they began. They can feel as deep and as old as our very selves. One response to brokenness is to deny it, to pretend it isn't there. Another is to accept it as permanent, as beyond our control. But if we are able to find the courage, we may respond to brokenness by desiring healing, by desiring wholeness. With wounds so deep, healing and wholeness can seem impossible. What we need in order to have the courage to heal is faith: the faith that healing and wholeness are, against all indications, possible.

The words of Mary Grigolia's hymn are as much a statement of faith as we're ever likely to hear: "I know this rose will open. I know my fear will burn away. I know my soul will unfurl its wings. I know this rose will open." She expresses brokenness, and the faith that it will be healed, that she herself - her own soul - will find a way to become whole, to unfurl its wings and fly.

What is the opposite of faith? Fear. Fear makes us contract, pull away, disengage. Some fear is good for survival, but some fear is like a gray cloud, hiding from us what we need to see and showing us instead a murky mass that says, no, nothing is here, no hope is justified. Nobody home. Give up.

Doubt, on the other hand, is not the opposite of faith, even though it is often said to be. Doubt, rather, is just faith in disguise. Doubt is to faith as steam is to water: it's the same thing, just more excited. Without faith, there would be no doubt, and without doubt, there would be no faith. Doubt is like the kiln for the clay of hope: to become faith, hope needs to withstand the fire of doubt and become stronger. But it doesn't end there. Artists all of us, we have an endless number of ideas for our clay, an endless number of hopes, all ready to see if they can add to or change our faith. We imagine, we shape, we fire, and we grow.

By the way, there's a four-year-old girl who gleefully plays with clay on the studio floor. If we watch her, she'll give us some of our best ideas. Her name is curiosity.

## II. Faith in what?

We sometimes say we have faith that such and such will happen. But whether or not we make it plain, we must have faith in something in order to have faith that such and such will happen. So, faith in what?

In the United States, especially in the political rhetoric we've heard lately, the presumed answer is, God. As Unitarian Universalists, who may believe in no God, one God, many Gods, or something else entirely, we know that the answer is not so simple. James Luther Adams reminds us that there are many possible sources of faith: wealth, security, science, country, etc.

For me, faith, like God, is fundamentally relational. My faith arises out of my relationships - real relationships between real people. For me, it all comes down to this. When a person acts toward another with the message, "You're on your own," this breaks down faith. When a person acts toward another with the message, "I'm here with you," this builds up faith.

Our first reading today from the film "Dogma" illustrates this painfully well. When Bethany's mother says, "God has a plan," what she is, in effect, saying, is, "You're on your own." Even though Bethany gets angry at God - and for good reason, I might add - it's no accident that the moment she loses her faith is not when her plans are dashed, but when her mother can't sit with Bethany in Bethany's grief. And this is done in the name of God! We may want faith in God, but we need faith in each other. In order to have the courage to heal, we need to know that we are not on our own. If God is with us, if anything is with us, it lives in the presence of someone who can sit with us in our grief, in our joy, in our longing.

May we have the courage to heal, and the mercy and love to sit with our sisters and brothers in times of need and times of triumph. May we have faith - O, may we have faith! - in each other. Amen.