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When we hear the word faith we usually think about one's religious faith. But truth be told we have a lot of faith in many things. The most common things around us are accepted by faith. When we turn on the faucet we expect water to come out. When we turn on a light switch we expect the room to be filled with light. Technology is another element we have absolute faith in. We turn on the computer, type an email or letter and hit send and it is instantaneously transmitted to the recipient. We might not understand how it works but we have absolute faith that it will. As humans we thrive on faith. It gives us the courage to risk, not because we have to, but because we can.

However, the problem with religious faith is that sometimes we turn it into an intellectual exercise. We're great at talking about faith. But having faith, experiencing faith, feeling faith ... that's where so many of us fall just a wee bit short because faith is beyond reason. That famous line from the letter to the Hebrews tells us that, "Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." Or as another translation has it, "Faith gives substance to our hopes and convinces us of the realities we cannot see."

Frederick Buechner said that "Faith is not being sure where you're going, but going anyway. It's a journey without maps." Or we can say that faith is "not synonymous with certain certainty but it is a decision to keep your eyes open."

Let's go back for a moment to the letter of Hebrews and that marvelous statement about faith. The first thing to recognize is that Hebrews is actually not a letter. It's a sermon—a long sermon. In that 11th chapter, the beginning of which you just heard, the preacher lays out an articulation of the faith of our ancestors and throughout that chapter the preacher uses the words *by faith*. Abraham did this *by faith*. Noah did this *by faith*. Moses, David, the Israelites did this *by faith*. You see, it reminded a hurting community of the steadfastness and faithfulness of God: that even if people didn't know where they were going they trusted that God was with them and that they would *by faith* fulfill God's purposes through them. The sermon that the preacher was preaching was to a community that had lost heart, was discouraged, tired, in need of a word of hope and a promise for a better tomorrow. The preacher offered them not just a recitation of the faith that leads to Jesus, but an important reminder for you and for me that our God is faithful.

A lot of us were taught that faith is more of an intellectual exercise or a set of claims about who Jesus is and what he accomplished through his death and resurrection. Faith was to agree that certain theological statements about God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, the human condition, the Bible, and the Church, or what your specific church taught were true. Many Christians who spoke about "growing in the faith," meant they were honing their doctrinal commitments and making sure they had their theological ducks all in a row.

Frankly, I don't think those things bring you any closer into a relationship with God. Faith as it is described in Scripture is not, in other words, a destination. It's not a conclusion or a form of closure. Faith is a longing. Faith is a hunger. Faith is a desire.

If we recall the story of Abraham faith is the audacity to undertake a perilous journey simply because God asks us to not because we know ahead of time where we're going. Faith is the itch and the ache and the willingness to stretch out our imaginations and see new birth, new life, new joy — even when we feel withered and dead inside.

When we think of faith this way, then the opposite of faith is complacency, apathy, resignation, and cynicism. The opposite of faith is a disengaged acceptance of the status quo and a refusal to embrace holy restlessness as an incentive to work for a more just and loving world. The opposite of faith is accepting anything less than the kingdom God wishes to give us. It's hanging back and holding still when the call of God in our lives is to move.

Someone who heard that call to move was Millard Fuller. From humble beginnings in Alabama, he rose to become a young, self-made millionaire at age 29. Despite having a successful business and a pile of possessions, his life was empty and his marriage was dying. Fuller decided to re-evaluate his values and direction. His "soul-searching" led to a renewal of his Christian commitment and reconciliation with his wife. The Fullers then took a drastic step: they decided to sell all of their possessions, give the money to the poor, and begin searching for a new focus for their lives. They started Habitat for Humanity. Fuller says, "I see life as both a gift and a responsibility. My responsibility is to use what God has given me to help God's people in need."

Fuller found this new direction for his life to be life-giving and it has been life-giving for the millions who have become involved in Habitat since it began in 1976. Fuller engaged in an active listening faith instead of a set of doctrines.

What makes people do that? Are they somehow "super religious?" Most of the people who are drafted into the adventure of faith in the Bible aren't any more religious than anyone else. Abraham and Sarah were ordinary people. Joseph and Mary were ordinarily the kind of people you never hear anything about. Moses, David, Ruth - in every case, there is nothing in the biblical stories about them to suggest that they were more pious, prayed harder, or had some unique divine connection that the rest of us don't have. Scripture seems to go out of its way to suggest the opposite. They were ordinary people who made mistakes and committed sins, just like we do. They were just trying to get on with their lives like the rest of us, when suddenly, in quite an unexpected, unwanted, unanticipated way they are called to make a decision, to open a door to the future, to take a risk and jump. And they did it, reluctantly sometimes, but they did it. When God called Moses, we get a full chapter of kvetching from Moses - every reason under the sun why he shouldn't go to Pharaoh and plead God's case. But he went. He did it.

I know we can fall prey to comparing our faith journey to that of Abraham and other Biblical heroes and believe that such a faith is far beyond us. But the truth is faith can grow, just like it did for all of them, if we only nurture it.

Taking risks is not easy. Acting out our faith takes courage. But that is what we are called to do. Millard Fuller said, "It's not your blue blood, your pedigree or your college degree that matters. It's what you do with your life that counts."

These texts call us to evaluate our lives and our priorities. What do we treasure? Where is our heart? We don't have to be Millard Fuller or Abraham, Moses or any other person. But we are called to be people of faith. We are called to put our faith into action. We just have to answer the call.

Jesus calls us to put our faith into action every day. All of us take risks at times. We would never have or do anything if we didn't. Helen Keller got it right when she said, "Life is either a daring adventure or nothing at all."

What is faith? Faith tells us that in those inevitable times of doubt, we'll have nothing to fear. In times of darkness, we'll never be alone. In times of despair, we'll know

at our core that hope will return. That's what having faith is. It's knowing God is always with us. But most of all remember, "Faith gives substance to our hopes and convinces us of the realities we cannot see." Amen.