

A Budding Faith

“And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.” (Hebrews 11:6) These words seem so simple and clear. Yet, they are mysterious and profound.

Many have read these words and have had to admit: “I don’t have that faith!” I try to believe. I do! But, I can’t wrap my head around God. I can’t figure God out.” I feel like can’t believe.”

In response to this dilemma, I offer this parable. One day a senior pastor presented a junior pastor with a stem from a rosebush. At the end of the stem were two big green rosebuds. The senior pastor gave the following instructions to the pastor in training: “My challenge to you is this: to form the rose bloom that is hidden within one of these buds without damaging the petals.” The junior pastor took the stem and began to pry one of the rosebuds open with his fingers. The bud and the flower within were instantly and irreparably destroyed. The pastor took the stem back and placed it a glass of water and put it on the windowsill. He then instructed his junior to return the next day at the same time.

The next day the junior pastor returned as instructed. He immediately went to the window and stared at twig sitting in the glass of water. The second bud had opened. The beautiful bright red rose hidden in the second bud was formed with every petal intact.

The senior pastor admonished his junior with these words. “God created the rosebush, the bud and the flower. He provided the means by which the flower would emerge from the bud. Faith in God is the same. God is the author and the creator of our faith in Him.”

He continued: “As human beings we try to play God. We believe that we can be the author and the creator of our faith in God. We believe that we can make faith bloom and grow in our lives. When we try to create and author our faith, we will fail. He went on: “Yet, when we commit the bud to God and follow God’s Word, a miracle can happen. God made the following promise through the Prophet Isaiah: “As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.” (Isaiah 55:10-11). I committed the branch and the bud to the water. The water made the bud open and the flower emerge. God’s word is like the water, it can make faith bud and bloom in us when, like the plant, we drink it in.”

The senior pastor was so right. The whole purpose of God’s word is to create faith. The Apostle John wrote: “Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” (John 20:30-31) God’s word is living and active. The Holy Spirit works through God’s word and causes faith to bud, bloom and grow.

Water is a wonderful image for God’s word. Still water is like a mirror. You can see yourself in it. The Apostle Paul taught us that God’s word is like a mirror, it allows us to see our reflection, who we really are. Scriptures teach us that human beings were created as male and female. God put a love and desire in the man for the woman and a love and a desire in the woman for the man. God told them to be fruitful and multiply. Human beings were created in innocence. There was no evil or guile in them. God and humanity lived in perfect harmony.

Scriptures disclose that evil existed in the world. Evil is personified in the person of Satan, the Devil. The Devil beguiled our first parents. He caused them to doubt God's word. God's word said don't eat this fruit or you will die. Satan caused them to covet divinity. They wanted to share in God's divinity. We wanted to be like God; knowing good from evil. The fruit would give them that power. They did not want to ask God for this gift, Satan convinced them to reach out and take it by eating the forbidden fruit. They ate the fruit, they shared in divinity, in newfound knowledge, but, at the same time they acquired mortality, their lives would end. We die.

From that point forward the Old Testament Scriptures point to the coming of the Son of God who would liberate us from the power of sin, death and the Devil. God gave us a law in the Old Testament, a perfect law that disclosed the heart and mind of God and his desire for humanity. God's law is also a mirror, it shows us who we are. It lays before us our failures in our relationship with God and others. It also shows us that try as we might, we cannot live up to God's law. We cannot justify ourselves before God by obeying God's Law. God's Law thus drives us to despair. We realize that we can't save ourselves.

By His teaching, preaching, perfect life, His miracles and his resurrection from the dead Jesus declared and testified to His divinity, that He was, is and always will be God's Son. By His innocent suffering and death on the cross He testified to His humanity and to His passionate desire to suffer and die for our sins. Jesus promised that He was the resurrection and the life and that all who believed in Him would have eternal life. (John 11:25-26) By His resurrection from the dead He opened the way to eternal life to all who believe in Him. When the Gospel is proclaimed in its truth and purity, that we are sinners that cannot save ourselves and that Christ's crucifixion and death paid for that sin and set us free from sin death and the Devil, the Holy Spirit causes faith in God to bud within us.

A faith that God causes to bud and bloom within us, finds concrete expression in works of sacrificial love. Christians reach out and satisfy the needs of others. They offer water, food, clothing, shelter and aide to the needy and stranger. (Matthew 25:34-40). Christians can forgive those who persecute them and even kill them as St. Stephen did as they stoned him for believing in Jesus. As he died he asked God: "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Then he fell on his knees and cried out, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." (Acts 7:59-60).

I have to admit that more often than not, I am like the junior pastor, I believe that I am the author and creator of my faith in God and can do the same for others. Yet, all God asks me to do is be immersed in His Word, to be convicted of my sinfulness, that I am trapped in my own sin, and let Jesus and Him crucified do the rest. I pray you will dive into His Word with me and be transformed. We meet Sundays at 9:00 and 10:30 AM. See you poolside!

In Christ

Pastor Ed