

Have Faith (It's a Gift!)

It's only a foot and a half off the ground, but to the little girl it seems like the world drops out below her after the edge of the couch cushion. Her father's arms are wide open, inviting her to take the leap but the potential tumble is too much. So she just collapses into the cushions with nervous giggles.

"Just try one more time" her dad says. "I'll hold you the entire way down." So she stands and even before her toes are hanging over the edge, his arms are under her arms. "3" he bounces her down into the cushion. "2, 1" and like that she's blasting off, through no strength of her own, flying through the air in his arms, landing safely in his arms.

He said he'd catch her, and he wasn't lying. The floor far down was no threat when she was in his arms, and he was even strong enough to carry her the entire way there.

And you know the rest of the story. She builds up enough confidence to jump by herself, one foot, two feet, dad standing further and further away but catching her each time nonetheless. This timid toddler has learned that with her dad standing as a safety net, she can be a little stunt-man. Her hesitations melt away and her confidence grows as her confidence in her father grows.

Don't worry, little one. Don't be anxious. Have faith. These are our readings for today, and they can't speak any further against our natural inclinations. Worry and anxiety come instinctually to us in a world full of unknowns, with everything essentially out of our control. Even those things that are practically certain (weddings after a proposal, a birth after a pregnancy, a feast after the preparation), as we await their appearance we are filled with an unsettled feeling until their moment arrives and our eyes can see them, our hands can hold them.

So we do what little we can to ensure all goes well. We put pesticides on crops; we run premarital courses for the newly engaged; we lock the doors at night; we put money in the savings account. And there's not a thing wrong with taking these precautions. In fact, in a broken world that's out to steal from you and hurt you, using the God-given gift of a brain to take some precautions is a good thing.

But what's our hope in having a savings account, in taking your vitamins, in putting on your seatbelt? The moment we are content in these measures, satisfied in the precautions we've taken and certain we will be okay, we are verging on idolatry, placing our trust in things created rather than in the Creator, and we are set up to be let down. Because nothing we can do to protect ourselves and provide for ourselves will last. Though these are the safety nets we can see and feel and build up with our own hands, they are not a real safety net. Because they are tangible, they seem trustworthy and true but the only certain help is invisible.

The Father, whom you can't see, cares about you more than anything else in the rest of creation. Yet even for them, he provides. Berries for the bears and mice for the eagles, and fresh snow on the mountain peaks to water the forests for the coming spring and summer. There are worms for the robins, there's sun for the lilies and daisies and even for the snakes resting on the rocks. And alongside God demonstrating care for the entirety of creation, He has promised that He will always care and provide: "The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season. You open your hand; you satisfy the desire of every living thing." (Psalm 114:15-16). And Jesus teaches us to pray for daily bread, and even more so that our heavenly Father knows how to give good gifts better than we would ever dream of giving. He knows your needs; He rejoices to hear your prayers; and He has more than enough power and wisdom to answer as He knows best. So don't worry, don't fret; live this day in faith.

Live like Abraham, walking through the desert into an unknown promised land. Live like Noah building a boat for a coming storm that only by the grace of God you and your family and two of every animal will live through.

In the sermon we call Hebrews, these people, along with Enoch and Moses and Abel and many more of the faithful saints before us, they are presented as if they confidently took one step after another, never wavering in their certain trust that God would provide and deliver. But when you read through the texts that Hebrews is referring to, we must be certain that they were not perfectly faithful. Abraham doubted God's promises and His wife laughed, and they entered into each new phase not by their own convincing but by the promise of God. And Noah doesn't come out of his story looking perfect; it's not long after the flood subsides that sin has proven it remains in this world, even out of the faithful remnant carried on the boat.

It is not as though they had convinced themselves that God is real and that God cares for them, and then willed their lives into perfect obedience.

No, they heard the promises of God, and they saw His faithfulness in the little moments and the big moments, and they learned to trust, as hard as it may have been.

Like the little girl, who needed to be shown, from beginning to end, that her father was there, that he was strong, and that he cared, so does God treat us.

He has given you parents to feed you and care for you; He has provided feast after feast on your table, everything ranging from plain oatmeal to prime rib dinners, and He's supplied constant care through teachers and doctors and farmers. He has promised to be there through these means and He has followed through on His Word. And even where the world has chipped away at His perfect gifts, the days when we were hungry, the moments when we doubted our parents loved us, He was persistently present to carry us through those hardships. And now His fulfilled promise from days gone by gives us the faith we need to hope in His continued care.

And likewise, we can see from the saints of old, those whom God has commended to us in Scripture for our faith. We see time and time again that He was good to His Word, promising a way out of slavery and then delivering the Israelites through the Red Sea. He did not fail to provide dry ground after the flood washed away the world that Noah and His family knew—but He gave them a land to live in again and a promise never to steal life from all of creation like that again.

And to each of these wanderers, waiting for the final fulfilment of God's promise to Adam and Eve, when the evil one would be judged, brokenness done away with, and at last they are welcomed into that city of God, God was faithful to provide the daily bread for their pilgrimage here on earth and faithful to provide faith, the hope they needed to trust in a kingdom they couldn't see at a distance and a king they couldn't yet set their eyes upon. In their time they never received the things promised, but by faith they knew God's gifts were already theirs. For if it is God who has spoken, God who has promised, God who has worked every day so far, what room is there for uncertainty? They, just like us, might waver in their conviction, but on God's end, once it is promised, it is as good as done.

And how much clearer is this for us who stand on the other end of salvation's fulfillment, the kingdom's accomplishment?

Had Jesus spoken today's sermon about anxiety to Sarah or Enoch or Noah, they could have said, "Yes Lord, as You promise, so I'll believe." But you and I, as we hear that it is the Father's joy, His good pleasure to give us the kingdom, that we must seek it first and all the smaller stuff will simply follow suit, we get to hear this promise and then reflect on the cross and know how He has worked, and that all is now completed. They waited for all the details to be ironed out and revealed; we simply wait for time to come to its conclusion.

Yet even still, for you and I, for we who know the cross and the empty tomb, who confess that Christ sits at the right hand of God, reigning even now, we worry about work and family and health and politics. Even with the promises put in front of us, even with faith placed in our ears and our hearts, we still get swept up in what we will eat and what we will wear, in how we will secure our lives amidst all life's uncertainties.

But have faith. Your fragile conviction is no reason to despair, for Christ went to the cross confident in the God who cared for Abraham and Sarah, Noah and his family and Abel and Enoch. He went to the cross, despising its shame and enduring its pain, certain that the kingdom was coming even as His life was pouring out of His veins. And with the water and the blood which flowed from His side, your doubt is forgiven and you may again know that you are carried, from beginning to end, in the arms of a forgiving God, the Son of God who died for you and rose for you and has cared for you through every second.

Hearing this again is the only way to sustain you through doubt, to carry you even through your most convinced of days. When the worries of this world spring up like the mountains, or when people place before you reasons to disbelieve Christ and His work, don't try and build up arguments and reasons why this all must be true. Simply come back to hear of the faithfulness of your God; receive His faithfulness in your ears and on your tongue. Remind yourself of His faithfulness as you shower in the morning, knowing that truly He washes your sins away as you wash away the dirt of yesterday.

And as you hear of His persistent work on your behalf, you will see it working still as He bolsters your belief and renews your hope, as His faithfulness strengthens your faithfulness and

you are carried onto the next day. Truly, seek first the kingdom of God. This is no command to break your back and crush your spirit, but it's a promise that when you hear of Christ bringing the kingdom to you, you will be renewed; you will trust that He is caring for you today once again. And one day you will at last know with your heart and your hands and your eyes that it truly was the joy of the Father to give you the kingdom.

Christ keep us firm in our faith until that final day.

Amen.