

VOL 9 : No. 2 : 2017

LUMUNOS

FAITH & LIGHT FOR THE JOURNEY



And Now Faith

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Doug Wysocky-Johnson

I have faith in many things. I'm currently writing this from a cruising altitude of 30,000 feet, so apparently I have faith that the pilots and maintenance crew of United Airlines are well trained. I have faith that my old Toyota is going to get me home. I have faith that the water from the faucet is safe to drink (though this year we learned that not everyone in this country has that luxury). I have faith in the stock market—if I didn't, my retirement funds would be in some form of the mattress. On a daily and even hourly basis, I put my faith in many things.

At a deeper level, I have faith in myself and the wisdom that comes from my experiences. I feel able to handle the things that come my way most of the time. And if I can't see a way forward, I have faith that there will be those around me to get me through. These friends and family have done just that often enough that I know they are trustworthy.

But then there is the whole matter of faith in God. I do believe, at least most of the time. The problem is that God is less visible than my old Toyota (my words), and requires "the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." (The Bible's words). It is the leap of Christianity and other religions that we put our faith in a Being

More Trustworthy than the Toyota

whose existence we cannot prove, and who is not directly visible to us. The truth is, I fall short on the 'conviction of things not seen' on a regular basis.

Faith Disappearing Like the Dew

Faith is a great thing. It can make all the difference in life, in attitude, and in the midst of trials. It feels good to believe in something, to trust someone. To have faith in God or anyone really, makes life better. And it is very hard to do. The poet Christian Wiman writes:

*"Faith steals upon you like dew:
some days you wake and it is there.
And like dew, it gets burned off
in the rising sun of anxieties,
ambitions, distractions."¹*

Because Wiman is a poet, I assume he chooses his words carefully. When listing the things that diminish faith, he names anxiety, ambition and distraction. When I look at my own life, I can see how each of these erodes my faith.

Anxiety lessens my faith in God because I turn in on myself. I'm anxious because I believe that it all rests on my shoulders. It is all about me, and I forget that God is present in the world.

Ambition diminishes my faith when I think that role, title or money will somehow bring me the peace I crave.

Distraction lessens my faith when I

continually let the bright shiny objects of the world around me—the latest app, gadget, or unimportant thing—get more of my time and energy than that which matters.

Faith Like a Mustard Seed

"Assurance" and "conviction" are not necessarily the words I would use to describe my faith. A better image describing my faith is that of a mustard seed, also from the Bible. A mustard seed is a very small thing, but it can grow.

My faith has grown through answered prayers (albeit not necessarily the way I wanted them answered). It has grown as I have "moved towards God like a trusting child in the midst of doubts, disbeliefs, setbacks, highs and lows." (See Clover Reuter Beal's article on pg. 3) My faith has grown because so many people wiser and more loving than I attest to faith's power in their own lives.

But in the end, I have faith in God simply because I choose to. The Toyota will someday let me down, probably sooner rather than later. Don't even get me started on United Airlines. But for some reason I can't fully explain, I trust God. And that makes all the difference.

¹ Christian Wiman, *My Bright Abyss: Meditation of a Modern Believer*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux 2013.

Doug Wysocky-Johnson is the Executive Director of Lumunos. He lives with his family in Richmond, VT, and can be reached at doug@lumunos.org.

Faith is a Reach

Mark 5:21-43

Rev. Clover Reuter Beal



Jesus crossed the Sea of Galilee only to find another crowd waiting on the other side. A crowd that crushed like the waves of the sea itself. There were those seeking healing for ailments, and those curious to see the novel itinerant healer. In the midst of all this movement, Jairus, four times reiterated by Mark—a leader, leader, leader—of the synagogue came looking for Jesus.

Jairus did not come to Jesus as a leader. That day, he was there with hand outstretched, vulnerable and in need. Jairus broke through the crowd and fell at Jesus' feet risking his own reputation. Because, as all parents know, there's nothing like a sick child to make you desperate. The Jairus on the ground was a desperate father begging the Healer to go with him, to reach out his hands and lay them on his precious 12-year-old girl. Jesus set out with Jairus.

A woman very different from Jairus entered the scene. Identified only by her affliction, she had been ill with a hemorrhage for as long as Jairus' daughter had been alive. She had run through all her resources going from doctor to doctor. Yet her health continued to decline. *"If I can reach this healer's clothes, I can be made well,"* she believed. Determined to do just that, she pressed in and reached through the crowd for her last chance for healing.

Her hand grazed his garment. Immediately, Jesus felt power go out of him and the woman felt the power go into her. She attempted to sneak away. But Jesus, insistent to find the one who touched him, did not allow the woman to remain invisible. Seeing him, she came forward, fell to her knees, and told her whole truth. He reached out his hand, raised her up as a daughter of God, and restored her to the community.

Meanwhile, in Jairus' home the professional mourners had already arrived. Jesus was too late; the girl had died. Jesus countered their grim news by announcing that the girl was only sleeping. In the face of the crowd's mockery, Jesus rebuked them and went to the girl. He reached out and took hold of the small hand of that dead girl—touching a body that by Law was untouchable—and raised her to new life.

These stories of new life for two very different daughters of God teach us that *faith and the act of reaching out toward God are inseparable*. Faith is action. Faith is a verb. Faith moves us toward God in times of need. Out of our deep longing to have God act on our behalf, borne out of our own suffering, we reach out. Faith is audacious, really. Praying for God's healing is an honest act of our heart's desire.

I grew up in a Christian tradition that fostered in me the belief that the spiritual life is reaching toward a goal. An illusory goal. That my faith was in the process of perfection and much of that perfection depended upon me, as if my faith was a construction of my own desire. Essentially, I didn't need God; I just needed willpower.

I don't believe one arrives at "having *faith*," as if faith is the goal. Faith is not a point in the distance we reach. Faith is not something we possess. **Faith is moving us toward God like a trusting child in the midst of our doubts, disbeliefs, setbacks, highs and lows.**

A *reaching faith* is a gift given by the Holy Spirit to us as we respond to our pain with honesty. Faith is measured out in coffee spoons in our times of need, not dumped on us in one load. I find doses of faith come in moments and in glimpses of the grace of God. Just enough for me to digest.



Continued from page 3

I know people who feel disheartened when their faith waxes and wanes. We might go days, months, or years without really feeling God's presence or the pleasure of the emotional ties that bind us to God. We might fear that we've constructed a god in our mind or worse we've drunk the Kool-Aid of religion.

Most often I believe our faith comes when we need it most; it is a gift given to us at times of desperation when we are calling out of foxholes. As writer Anne Lamott says, There are two types of prayers: "Help me, help me, help me," and "Thank you, thank you, thank you." Madeline L'Engle, the children's author of *A Wrinkle in Time*, said in an interview she believed suffering was a necessary part of a full life. She had experienced much loss in her own life. "In times when we are not particularly suffering we do not have enough time for God. We are too busy with other things. And then the intense suffering comes, and we can't be busy with other things. And then God comes into the equation: 'Help.' And we should never be afraid of crying out, 'Help.'"¹

A reaching faith, a "crying-out for Help" faith, springs forth through the Holy Spirit from a place of our deepest needs. A reaching faith is an honest revelation of our vulnerability. It is through disarmed, raw prayers that we ourselves discover our sincerest longings.

Jairus and the woman are you and I with our own needs for healing, and at times feeling desperate for it. I do not know what your illness looks like, what it feels like, how long you've endured it, or what others tell you about it. What I have confidence in is my trust that Jesus is ready to be interrupted by your cry for help—heal the wound that opens you to grace. The act of reaching out for God is enough. The desire to brush ever so gently the edge of the garment is enough. Your vulnerability is more than enough. That's the sort of faith we can all reach.

QUESTION FOR CONVERSATION
AND REFLECTION

**"When was a time
you reached out to God?"**

Reverend Clover Reuter Beal serves as Co-Pastor of Montview Boulevard Presbyterian Church in Denver, CO. Clover's interests are in adult education and spiritual formation. Her husband, Tim, is a professor of religious studies at Case Western Reserve University, and the greatest challenge in their lives is his weekly commute back and forth to Cleveland.

¹ Religion & Ethics Newsweekly, PBS, 2000.



Faith—is the Pierless Bridge

Emily Dickenson

Faith—is the Pierless Bridge
Supporting what We see
Unto the Scene that We do not—
Too slender for the eye

It bears the Soul as bold
As it were rocked in Steel
With Arms of Steel at either side—
It joins—behind the Veil

To what, could We presume
The Bridge would cease to be
To Our far, vacillating Feet
A first Necessity.

*The Dalai Lama
and
Howard C. Cutler*

The Power of Faith

The power of faith, generated on a widespread scale by religious traditions, is interwoven in the lives of millions. That deep religious faith has sustained countless people through difficult times. Sometimes it operates in small quiet ways, sometimes in profound transformative experiences. Every one of us, at some time during our lives, has no doubt witnessed that power operate on a family member, a friend, or an acquaintance. Occasionally, examples of the sustaining power of faith find their way onto the front pages. Many are familiar, for instance, with the ordeal of Terry Anderson, an ordinary man who was suddenly kidnapped off the street in Beirut one morning in 1985. A blanket was thrown over him, he was shoved into a car, and for the next seven years he was held as a hostage by Hezbollah, a group of Islamic fundamentalist extremists. Until 1991 he was imprisoned in damp, filthy basements and small cells, blindfolded and chained for extended periods, enduring regular beatings and harsh conditions. When he was finally released, the world turned its eyes toward him and found a man overjoyed to

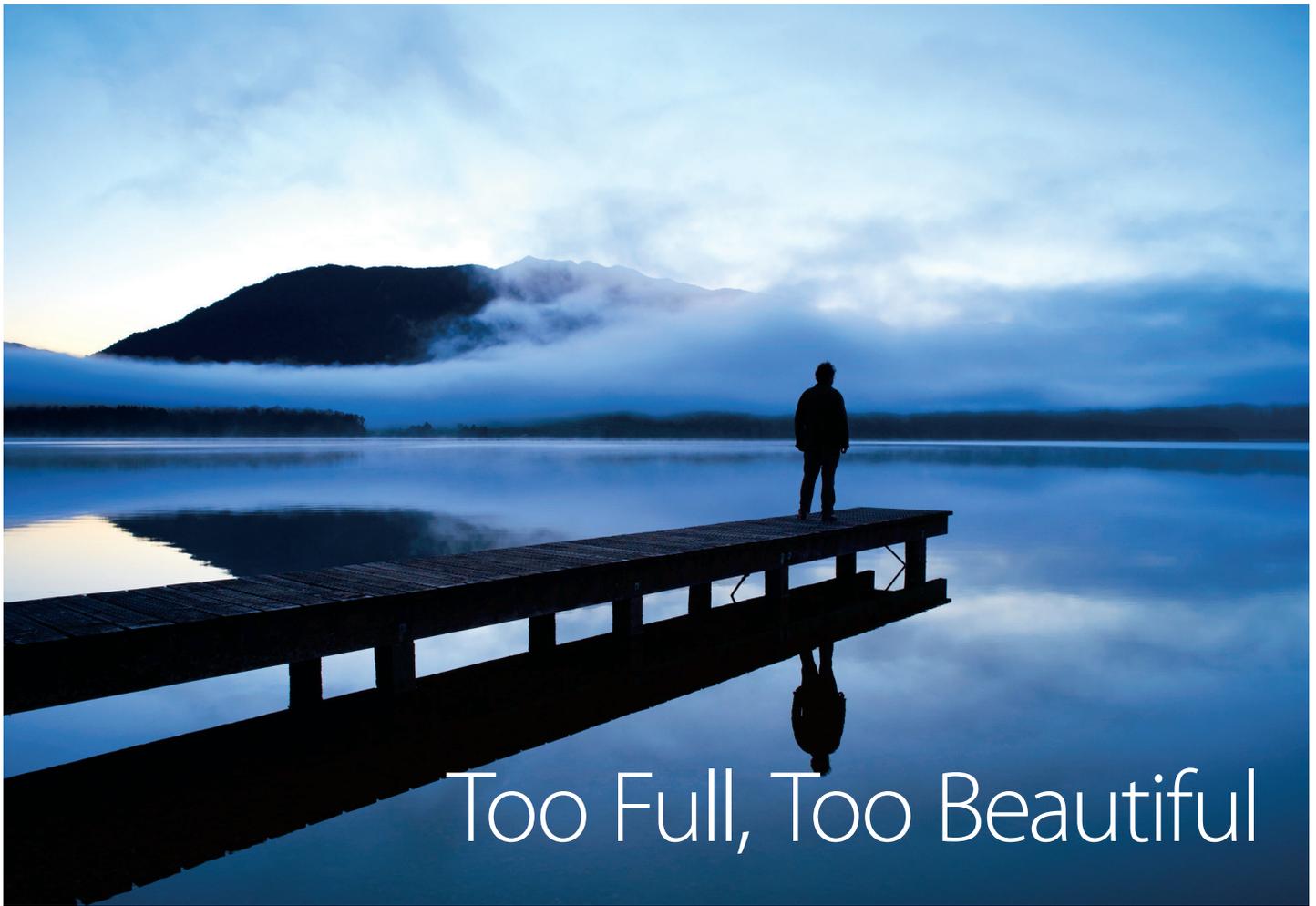
be returned to his family and his life but with surprisingly little bitterness and hatred toward his captors. When questioned by reporters about the source of his remarkable strength, he identified faith and prayer as significant factors that helped him endure his ordeal.

The world is filled with such examples of the ways in which religious faith offers concrete help in times of trouble. And extensive recent surveys seem to confirm the fact that religious faith can substantially contribute to a happier life. Those conducted by independent researchers and polling organizations (such as the Gallup company) have found that religious people report feeling happy and satisfied with life more often than non-religious people. Studies have found that not only is faith a predictor of self-reports of feelings of well-being, but a strong religious faith also appears to help individuals deal more effectively with issues such as aging or coping with personal crises and traumatic events. In addition, statistics show that families of those with strong religious belief often have lower rates of delinquency, alcohol and drug abuse, and ruined marriages. There is even some evidence

to suggest that faith may have benefits for people's health—even for those with serious illnesses. There have, in fact, been literally hundreds of scientific and epidemiologic studies establishing a link between strong religious faith, lower death rates, and improved health. In one study, elderly women with strong religious beliefs were able to walk farther after hip surgery than those with fewer religious convictions, and they were also less depressed following surgery. A study done by Ronna Casar Harris and Mary Amanda Drew at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center found that heart-transplant patients with strong religious beliefs have less difficulty coping with postoperative medical regimens and display better long-term physical and emotional health. In another conducted by Dr. Thomas Oxman and his colleagues at Dartmouth Medical School, it was found that patients over the age of fifty-five who underwent open-heart surgery for coronary artery or heart valve disease and who had taken refuge in their religious beliefs were three times more likely to survive than those who did not.

The benefits of a strong religious faith sometimes come about as a direct product of certain specific doctrines and beliefs of a particular tradition. Many Buddhists, for instance, are helped to endure their suffering as a result of their firm belief in the doctrine of Karma. In the same way, those who have an unshaken faith in God are often able to withstand intense hardship because of their belief in an omniscient and loving God—a God whose plan may be obscure to us at present but One who, in His wisdom, will ultimately reveal His love for us. With faith in the teachings of the Bible, they take comfort in verses such as Romans 8:28: *“All things work together for the good to them that love God, to them who are called according to His purpose.”*

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Too Full, Too Beautiful

Through the years, Faith at Work/Lumunos has remained vibrant in an ever-changing world because of the community of people who have been part of our work. We have been blessed by these “Lumunaries.” In this column, we celebrate these people who embody our mission “to help people live fuller, more authentic lives as they align their life choices and relationships with their sacred values.” Some of the people we will highlight have passed on; others are still with us. Either way, their impact is immeasurable.

Bill Johnson might hold the record for the longest consistent involvement with Lumunos—beginning with an event in the 1970’s and continuing thru to today—a run of nearly 50 years. Although in his 90’s, Bill still organizes a Lumunos men’s retreat in Florida every year. And, he is a core member of our *Stewardship Mission Community* and *Circle of Light* groups. Some of this can be attributed to the fact that Bill’s son is the Executive Director of Lumunos, which means a bit of son to father guilt has been applied. But most of his energy springs from the fact that Bill and Lumunos share many of the same values. Lumunos has shaped Bill in many ways, and Bill has most certainly shaped Lumunos.

We thought it best to let Bill explain this in his own words. Let’s start with an excerpt from the autobiography he wrote for family and friends:

“Sometime later I was brought into relationship with Faith at Work (Lumunos), people who were seekers and, in some sense, strugglers as was I. I was amazed to find people who could share their joys and sorrow, anger, frustration and anxieties in small group settings as we exchanged experiences with one another. I had become used to the “always happy” Christian style of earlier years, which never really computed for me. It was as though one had to put on some kind of joyful countenance to really be a Christian. This was not at all the style in Faith at Work as we listened to one another, and considered possible new ways to live our lives. It was for me, and still is today, new and challenging and liberating.”

About his first Faith at Work event in 1976, Bill writes:

“Another gain involved the freedom to begin to unlock some of my feelings, a process greatly facilitated during my first Faith at Work Leadership Training Institute experience. ...I experienced anxiety, joy, anger, rejections and reconciliation—a whole range of emotional highs and lows. I found it possible, perhaps for the first time, to acknowledge and begin to deal responsibly with hidden feelings.

Coming from an engineering discipline, it had been difficult for me to live into feelings. I needed to know why I felt lonely and afraid, why I felt happy and loving, why I felt depressed and sad, not just that those feelings existed. I still believe that understanding the experience is important, but if we don't 'feel the feelings' first, much of their value is lost."

In the 1980's, Bill and his wife Marianne wrote an article for Faith at Work Magazine called "Growing Separately Together." Each told their part of the story. In the article, you hear three of the values that Lumunos and Bill share: vulnerability, relationship, and spiritual growth:

"In my morning reflections by the lake, I also experienced feelings of deep loneliness. It seemed that Marianne and I were doing more and more things separately: social schedules, study groups, workshops, and now even vacation. This pattern was contrary to most of my earlier models of marriage and seemed threatening to me. I began to realize that I had never really dealt with aloneness. My family of origin was people-oriented and aloneness was not a priority. As I walked the lake alone, I, for the first time began to see solitude as a gift and not a threat. ...As Marianne and I struggled to find an intimacy-solitude balance, we were struck by Henri Nouwen's words:¹

'People can only be together when they affirm each other as separate human beings who receive their sense of self not from each other but from God';

'Intimacy born out of solitude creates a space between the partners where real movement is possible - where a dance can take place.'

As I reflect on the image of the lake and the mountain, I see little likelihood of the winds subsiding. Too many questions remain unanswered. Important vocational decisions must be faced. Should I continue in my present occupation which I enjoy, or explore other possibilities? And in view of financial commitments, do I have any choice? How will Marianne and I restructure our marriage to reflect changing needs? Will we find it possible to make the kind of spiritual connectedness necessary for a viable marriage, and still be able to pursue independent careers?

Change seemed at this midlife juncture to be the dominant theme of my life—change within myself and in my most significant relationships. It was a time of exciting growth, but also of restlessness, uncertainty, and ambivalence. ...The mountains spoke of the certainty of God in the world and within me, the quiet center of strength and love. The turbulent lake and the mountain—change and the still point. I became keenly aware of my need for both. The quiet center, devoid of risk and change, could produce a kind of stagnation, and rapid change, without the still point, spoke of chaos."

One of the core pieces of Lumunos' mission is to help people listen for, and follow, their call at all stages of life. Bill

continues to live that out in his 90's. In a recent interview, he said *"I have come to see that the concept of call is more important in my 90's than ever before. My time and energy is precious, and I want to make the most of it."*

In the past few years he has taken lessons to better understand his iPhone, tutored children in math, joined his church choir, and begun to write poetry. In this poem called *"The Fall,"* he writes about a hip injury he sustained. But true to Bill Johnson and Lumunos, he uses the experience to find deeper meaning:



*Well I've fallen again.
Big deal you say.
Pick yourself up
and get going.
At nineteen perhaps,
but not approaching ninety.*

*A moment of distraction
and a fractured hip
and now
several months of rebuilding.
House calls, walkers, special procedures,
learning how to sit, to walk, to shower.*

*So why this encroaching sense of fear
of doing it again?
What at this age is it safe to do?
Anything really?
Walking slowly
avoiding every root, crack, stick?*

*No thanks, I'll take my chances.
Life is too full,
too beautiful
to give into fear.
Still,
Its there
And gives me pause.
A good thing perhaps.²*

"Life is too full, too beautiful to give in to fear." Important words from a true Lumunos Luminary.

¹ *Out of Solitude: Three Meditations on the Christian Life*, Henri Nouwen, 2004

² *Reflections Along the Way*, Bill Johnson, 2016



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*“Faith is to believe what you do not see;
the reward of this faith is to see what you believe.”*

Saint Augustine



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