

FOUR DIMENSION FAITH

Mark 11:12-24

Ephesians 3:14-19

August 26, 2018

Faith is one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, is it? Sometimes I wonder, I mean we say, “I don’t have the kind of faith that could take that mountain and have it thrown into the sea. There are times when I’m sick, or confused, or in despair, and don’t even know how I’m going to get to the next *day*. Move mountains?”

How ‘bout just faith to live our lives? You and I don’t do real well even at that, do we? It’s been said for many years, but is still very true. We are living in an apathetic, bored, uncommitted time. And in many ways you and I are apathetic, bored and uncommitted people, with a faith to go with it. The person who *is* deeply concerned and passionately committed to a crusading cause, we regard at best with some distant wistfulness, and at worst as a fanatic, a freak. Mostly, we just don’t want them around unsettling us.

You and I have learned to speak learnedly if not quite comfortably of tentative goals for our life and our faith, of proximate justice in our political and social problems. We’ve all heard the term ‘viable solutions.’ It fits here. It is a solution or a goal which really isn’t much, but it works. And it is the best we can hope for.

What happened to spiritual *gifts*? What happened to faith that could move mountains? It is dangerous to the life of your faith and mine to forget and neglect the farther horizons and larger dimensions of faith and life. Not those horizons and dimensions of practicality and reasonableness and limit, but the *farther* horizons and *larger* dimensions that have been disclosed and revealed to us.

That you, being rooted and grounded
in love may have the power to comprehend
with all the saints
what is the BREADTH and LENGTH
and HEIGHT and DEPTH,
and to know the love of CHRIST
which surpasses knowledge
that you may be filled with
All the fullness of GOD.

Paul, who was writing from prison and therefore knew a thing or two about “near-enough” or “almost there.”

... Or injustice ... Makes the audacious statement that the Ephesians (and therefore we) be **filled with all the fullness of GOD**. The love of GOD has a staggering vastness, a grandeur about it which dwarfs our tentative plans and our viable solutions. It lifts our eyes of faith to the farther horizons. How much does your faith take in? How broad is it? How high? How long? How deep? In other words how closely can you say your faith brings you to being filled with **ALL THE FULLNESS OF GOD?**

Let’s look at the **BREADTH** of the Christian faith. How much does the faith take in? More personally, how much does *your* **FAITH TAKE IN?** What are its frontiers? What are its boundaries? How far will our faith go without relapsing into reasonableness, or collapsing into fear?

When we put those questions in front of us, I’ll bet that you are as ashamed as I am. We know that the Christian faith should have no boundaries, no frontiers, no barriers, no spite-fences, no restrictions of time or space, or class or race. Yet, if you and I are honest with ourselves, we would have to admit that our faith operates with fairly narrow limits.

Don’t we think of our church here at Greenwood rather than *our Church*, as a whole? Some of us think of denominations or of different schools of theology, meaning emphasis laid here or emphasis laid there, of accents on this or accents on that. It’s limiting to the breadth of our faith, a confusion of tongues.

Let’s go farther and find more boundaries. How ‘bout that treacherous frontier between religion and politics? Does your faith extend into your politics or is there a false and limiting boundary, usually called “separation of church and state?” How about it? Does it extend into those still painful and murky regions of black and white, between labor and management, between immigrants and citizens, or between the United States and the Middle East? I think when we look at it like this that my faith, and I’m sure yours, too, is set and fixed within the provincial bounds of our little prejudices and fears.

Where is all the fullness of GOD?

What about the **LENGTH** of our Christian faith? To what length does our faith go? How much do you and I hope for? What are our endurance limits?

Do we go all the way in our Christian witness? Or do we stop short at our trust and in the saving act of JESUS and go no farther?

Questions like these have got to disturb us, for so many of us are exhausted and tired. You and go that mile, perhaps, but most of us don't have the strength or courage, or the enthusiasm to go the second mile.

There is a Christian Community in the Scottish isles that has long been known for being on the cutting edge. The leader of the Iona community, George Macleod, was elected Moderator of the Church of Scotland, and while in that position, shocked an audience by saying, "Church members are the dullest people on earth." A little unfair? It sure has enough truth in it to sting?

How unlike the New Testament description of GOD's love in Christ is our own tired, short-run mood. J.B. Phillips translated a passage of I Corinthians this way:

Love knows no limit to its endurance,
no end to its trust, no fading of its hope;
it can outlast anything. It is, in fact,
the one thing that still stands when
all else has fallen.

I don't know about you, but I want a faith that's as long as that. I want all the *fullness of GOD* in my faith.

So ... The HEIGHT of our faith How high up does our faith reach? What is the higher source of our lives? Surely, I think, you and I would say that our faith is always looking up, that it is in GOD that we live and move and have our being. Don't we affirm, "I believe in GOD the Father Almighty?" Sure. But think of what that means.

Think of the vision Isaiah had. He said, "I saw the LORD high and lifted up" and because of what he saw, Isaiah confessed: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips ... For my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of Hosts."

Elton Trueblood tells a more modern tale of the way we think of GOD. In one of his books he tells of an experiment he made with some college students. He asked them to regroup the 10 Commandments in what they thought was the order of importance. More than 90 % put the first three commandments last. "I am the LORD your GOD, and you shall have no other gods before me," "You

shall not make for yourself any graven image,” and “You shall not take the name of the LORD your GOD in vain” were the three least important commandments to them.

It seems, with Isaiah’s fear of the holy god (‘Woe is me’) and with Elton Trueblood’s experiment, that if we could, we would have breadth and length to our faith, but very little height. How unlike CHRIST we are. And fearful, too. Our faith really doesn’t have to rise that high. Matter of fact, GOD in His height, has already grasped us. Will our faith have the courage merely not to pull away from Him? Let’s you and I rise up (grasping) and aspire to *all the fullness of GOD*.

Then there is DEPTH. How far down will faith go? Will it bend to give help to the brokenhearted, to extend a lifting hand to the downtrodden, to raise a sinner out of sin, to bind up the wounds of a humanity struck low? How far down does your faith go? Would you and I, in a word, love the unlovely?

That IS what the fullness of GOD is all about. We know it throughout the New Testament. GOD does not stand aloof, but searches us out, you and me; becomes flesh and dwells among us, identifies with our sin and takes our waywardness upon himself. Would we have the depth of faith found in the fullness of GOD?

Breadth, length, height, and depth. These are the four dimensions of Christian life and faith. How do you react to my outline of them? Are we depressed by their vastness and our littleness? Our failing by comparison? Are they so out of sight and beyond reach as to leave us disheartened? Well, it’s easy enough, and common enough, to tone down those dimensions and horizons, to foreshorten them, to make them manageable, “proximate,” or “viable.”

But let us be sure about what it is we are doing. Faith, after all, is one of the legitimate *gifts* of the Holy Spirit. In a real sense, then, these four dimensions of length and breadth and height and depth are actually outlines of the profile of JESUS CHRIST Himself.

Suppose we ask of Him: how much does *He* take in? How far will *He* go? How high up does *He* reach? How far down will *He* stoop?

How much of JESUS CHRIST indwells and stretches you and me? That’s really the crux of it all, isn’t it? HE is the all the FULLNESS OF GOD.

