

Faith, Belief & God?

Faith and Belief

Last summer my husband, John, and I were canoeing in New Hampshire. At the end of a trip around the lake I climbed out of the canoe first, had one foot in the lake and one foot in the canoe. That's when things went wrong. While taking my foot out of the canoe, I caught my heel on the edge. Losing my balance, I instinctively reached for the most solid thing within my grasp-the canoe. There are times when grabbing on to what appears most solid and stable is exactly the wrong thing to do. When I resurfaced, I saw my husband sitting in a foot and a half of water fishing for his glasses on the lake bottom. In my attempt to save myself, I took an innocent bystander down as well. I tell this story not to demonstrate my lack of boating expertise, but to say that I understand the emotional impetus to grab onto what seems most stable and solid when the world is tipping us off our feet. In religious terms, we might say we are driven to hold ever more tightly to our beliefs when we are under stress.

Like grabbing a canoe for stability, depending on *belief* to keep us from going under is to grasp at the wrong thing. It is not our belief that we need to hold onto, but our *faith*. Though the two are often taken to mean the same thing, there is a subtle and critical difference. Faith is a deeply seated confidence, vital to our very existence; belief is only what we think is true, though we wouldn't stake our lives on it. Faith leaves room for mystery, belief does not. As Albert Einstein wrote in his personal credo, "The most beautiful emotion we can experience is the mysterious."

Sometimes what seems most solid and stable is only an illusion of stability. Things that appear more ethereal, that may seem to be the toughest to grasp, are in fact the most stable and secure. Love, faith, and community may seem to be intangible ideals, but if nurtured they can serve as the very bedrock of our lives.

Beliefs can fall away. But the things that seem most insubstantial-perhaps because they can be the hardest to come by have the greatest worth, and provide the steadiest base.

-Jackie Clement

Love Abundant

I lift my eyes up to the hills
from where will my help come?
My help comes from Love abundant.
my help comes from the hills
my help-my help, it comes from
ancient Mothers whose hearts beat in mine.
It comes from the trees that sway and the breeze that sways

them ...
my help comes from all that was and is and will ever be ... I lift my eyes ... hushed by
the soothing touch of waves caressing wounded shores
wounded souls
I lift my eyes ... to the horizon bathed by
the hum of mothers and mothers' mothers
cradling-gently rocking
I lift my voice-call of the sea trees sister moon mother
earth
my soul weeping-a symphony of life overflowing
I give myself
I too hum through every pore
with every breath
I give myself
an extension
of all that is, was, and ever will be.
-Alicia R. Forde

God's Tears

I sometimes think the stars are God's tears. Even God's sorrow creates sources of great illumination, joy and beauty through these celestial bodies. At our very best, we human beings are microcosms, containing within us sparks of divinity. Sometimes I think my own heart, shattered by sorrows, is like a cascade of diamonds. Each piece is valuable and radiant, a source of joy and illumination to beings known and unknown to me, as the stars are a source of strength and radiance to me, although I am unknown to them.
-Shuma Chakravarty

“I have one life and one chance to make it count for something... I'm free to choose what that something is, and the something I've chosen is my faith. Now, my faith goes beyond theology and religion and requires considerable work and effort. My faith demands—this is not optional—my faith demands that I do whatever I can, wherever I can, whenever I can, for as long as I can with whatever I have to try to make a difference.”

- Jimmy Carter

“Since truth in religion is like truth in poetry, by its very nature the language of religion is poetic language: God, soul, angels, spirit...salvation and sin. Because such words are imprecise, many people shy away from them. Today, however, I need such words. Rather than abandon it, I do my best to rescue the old language from captivity by

literalists, who strip it of all poetry, diminishing its symbolic nuance and vitality. Though easily reduced to an idol, God is still the biggest word I know. It points toward a power beyond our own yet mysteriously present within us. I am no longer ashamed to mine the poetry of my forebears in search of touchstones for my faith.”

- Forrest Church, *Bringing God Home*, p. 23

Questions & Activity

(Please respond to any of the questions, requests, and readings you feel moved by. It is not necessary to respond to all of them.)

- Share your faith, religious, spiritual, world view journey. In what or in whom do you have faith, trust, hope?
- Share a story of a transformational time in your life.
- What problems are there in making God a noun?
- Is there connection between God and creativity; between God and love?
- Both theism and atheism require belief and faith, since there is no proof either way confirming or denying the existence of a god or gods. What specifics have confirmed your beliefs?
- Some people use science to explain a world without a creator, while others see the complexity of the universe as proof positive of a creator. Where do you stand in this debate? Whether a believer or atheist, do you believe that the other side of the argument is just as powerful as yours? Do you think science will ever provide us with the answer to this age-old question?
- This month try to suspend your beliefs about theism, atheism, and agnosticism. Talk to a friend whose beliefs are opposite yours. (Ex: If you believe in a God(s), talk to an atheist or agnostic.) Ask that person what their view on God is and how they draw strength from their beliefs. As they describe their thoughts, close your eyes, imagine you are in their shoes and try to feel what they feel about God, and just deep listen. This exercise is about hearing someone else's beliefs and reserving judgment about their beliefs. All views on God and religions are just beliefs, and as UU's we must practice our principles that every person has a right to a free search for truth and meaning (Principle 4) and the acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations (Principle 3).

