

TRINITY NEWS

WEEK 34. August 18, 2019. Proper 15

The gist last Sunday's undelivered sermon:

Doubt has an undeservedly negative reputation in religious circles; it's something we are told we must keep at bay as it undermines faith. In fact, doubt is what makes faith 'faith' as opposed to certainty. Faith, as the writer of Hebrews tells us, deals with "things hoped for" and "things unseen," i.e. things that are not immediately present to us but that we *trust* are indeed true. But there's always the possibility that they aren't –i.e. there's always room for doubt.

Doubt is also essential for growth in the faith if it is faced honestly and directly, because doubts are in the end questions, and questions lead us into deeper engagement with our faith as we search for answers. Doubt helps faith grow and mature if it directly addressed. Doubt can only undermine true faith if it is ignored or suppressed and allowed to fester.

Faith that avoids dealing with doubt (that aspires to certainty) is especially vulnerable to it. It become inflexible and brittle and can come tumbling down when doubt slips past its defenses.

We must also remember that faith is ultimately not assent to a set of doctrinal statements – it is something far more mysterious than that! The hemorrhaging woman who reached out to Jesus in the crowd did not say to herself, "Oh, good, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, eternally begotten of the Father has just showed up!" No; the divine image in her recognized at once the presence of divine love in this stranger and reached out in faith; and that, the recognition and the reaching out, was the faith that saved her, made her whole.

I think it is very important to bear all this in mind when people come to us with their doubts, especially young people. Their questions should be entertained seriously and very honestly – "I don't know" is a perfectly acceptable answer. Let them know that we are all on the same journey of growth in the faith and that we don't have all the answers. Invite them to explore the faith with you. Do not feign a certainty you don't possess – odds are they will see through it.