



Let us pray: Direct us, O Lord, in all our doings with thy most gracious favor, and further us with thy continual help; that in all our works begun, continued and ended in thee, we may glorify thy holy Name, and finally by thy mercy, obtain everlasting life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*¹

Theological reflection – it can sound scary and it takes work. For many it’s the best part of Education for Ministry, commonly referred to as EfM. Theological reflection can be defined as thinking and talking about God. We take a common every day event or issue, or perhaps something tangible like a bowl, and use that as a launching point to ask how our lives are impacted, even defined, by what we believe or understand about God. We ask where God is in this event or issue – or how the tangible object helps us see God in the world. One of the joys of the discussion is to see how things we struggle with can give us insights into our faith. How what we struggle with is often the same issue that others struggle with.

Theological reflection can be a way to help us determine how we know what we know. It can be a way to help us explore our faith and our beliefs about God. With practice, it becomes a framework by and through which life decisions and choices are made. With time, theological reflection becomes integral to who you are and how you live in the world.

Many of us work in jobs that are “head-centered.” We operate on the scientific method: if it can’t be proved, if it can’t be repeated, then we say it isn’t true or it isn’t relevant.

Faith is not something that can be proved in the same way that a scientific experiment can be repeated. As the writer of the Letter to the Hebrews says so beautifully:” Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” Hope in this case is not mere whimsy but rather something that we believe will come to be based upon the exploration we have done. Hope often has a close corollary in endurance, in trust, in faith.

Faith is – well, faith. Something you believe based upon what you read and think about and talk over with others, or perhaps you have an experience that gives you a glimpse of the transcendence, but ultimately you have to make a leap and say “this I believe.”

¹ BCP, 832, Prayer for Guidance #57.

Most every Sunday we say the Nicene Creed together. We start with “we believe” this or that. The word in Latin is “credo” and several scholars suggest that the translation from Greek into English of credo as “I believe” is not the best translation. They suggest that if we think of our English words “I believe” as “this I give my heart to” that we would get a better sense and understanding of what the church fathers who met at Nicaea were after. Translating credo as “this I give my heart to” may make it easier for some of us who struggle with whether some of the statements are factually true – we can consider the statements as expressing what we understand and at the same time recognize the human limitations of understanding God.

Public Radio periodically broadcasts entries by people who have written essays about what they believe.² The purpose of the project is to share with others “the core values that guide their daily lives.” The “This I Believe” series goes back to a 1950’s radio series hosted by Edwin R. Murrow, one of the icons of journalism. Not everyone who submits an essay is a Christian. Not everyone whose essay is accepted for broadcast talks about religion or their faith. But some do.

Betsy Chalmers writes about faithfulness.³ She met her husband at 19, married him at 20. Saw him convicted and imprisoned at age 22. In her words: At 50, I have come to the conclusion that it is not the life I have that defines me, it is the way I choose to live that life. I choose to live it being faithful. This brings me peace, this allows me to have joy, this keeps me aware of my husband. My spiritual faith has given me the foundation to live this life, not just survive it. Faith in a God who has not abandoned me; faith in a man who loves me; faith in myself. I believe in faithfulness.

Betsy’s views are, in some ways, a contemporary reading of the lesson from Hebrews. We’re reminded of Abraham who left his home because God called him to go. To go to a place not disclosed to Abraham until he arrived there. Abraham was faithful because God was faithful to him. We’re told of those who are strangers and foreigners on the earth. Who could have looked back – and in fact could have chosen to go back. But they chose to look forward to a heavenly country. And God is not ashamed to be called their God. God has prepared a city for them.

Whether Abraham or Betsy, God works with us – often in unexpected ways. God is able to use people for the glory of God despite our circumstances. God sees what we do not.

“Faith is God’s gift to us and faith is our human response of trust and gratitude that issues in deeds of love and justice” according to John Shelley, a professor at Furman University in South

² <http://thisibelieve.org/> August 4, 2010.

³ <http://thisibelieve.org/essay/13296/> August 4, 2010.

Carolina.⁴ Faith is seeking an understanding of who God is and what God's call on our life is. Faith is our response, in the best way we know how, to God's love for us. Shelley continues: "Faith, then, is the perception that the way of Jesus is the way to become who I most wholly am, a creature in the image of God."

The writers of the EfM materials say that "Hebrews brings together the eternal truths of the gospel with the actual lives of people."⁵ That's a pretty good synopsis of theological reflection. By looking at the eternal truths of the Gospel we can see the intersections with our actual lives.

By considering the eternal truths of the Gospel we can see how to proceed when life is uncertain. Faith is the assurance of things hoped for. This hope is a sure and steadfast anchor for the soul (Heb. 6:19).

Go forth as God calls us with faith that God is faithful first, last and always. *Amen.*

⁴ John c. Shelley in Feasting on the Word, Year C, Volume 3. David Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, eds. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 330.

⁵ EfM, Year Two, The New Testament (Sewanee, TN: University of the South 2003), 462.