

**“Stronger Than Faith”**  
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**Menifee United Church of Christ**

“Praise the Lord!” That’s what an elderly woman would say every morning when she stood out on her front porch. Her neighbor, who was an atheist, would yell, “There ain’t no Lord!” One day, the elderly lady had some money trouble. So she went out on her front porch and shouted, “Praise the Lord! Dear God, please give me a bag of groceries! I need some food.” The next day she walked out on her front porch and there was a bag of groceries. She said, “Praise the Lord! Thank you, God, for my bag of groceries!” Just then her neighbor jumped out from behind a bush and said, “Aha! God didn’t do that, I did!” The woman said, “Praise the Lord! Not only did you give me a bag of groceries, but you made the devil pay for them.” That elderly woman had faith. She had faith in God. She had faith that God loved her. She had faith that God cared for her. She had faith that God helped her. But I also think she had something stronger than faith.

Faith. What is faith? According to the Bible, faith is the conviction of things not seen. I guess you could say that faith is like a child, who jumps from a high place into the arms of a parent, having faith that the parent cares for the child. Or you could say that faith is like two lovers walking hand in hand, having faith that they will always be together. And you could say that faith is like driving across a bridge, and having faith that the bridge won’t collapse. But sometimes our faith is misplaced. Sometimes parents don’t care for a child. Sometimes two lovers do drift apart. Sometimes faith is misplaced when we drive across a bridge and sometimes it might collapse. Still, it’s good to have faith. It’s good to want to have faith, to want to have more faith, to want to increase our faith, because without faith this would be a heartless, cruel and cold world. So we’ve got to have faith and we want to increase our faith.

Jesus’ disciples didn’t seem to get faith. According to the gospel of Luke, chapter 17, one day the disciples said to Jesus, “Increase our faith!” Now think about that for a moment. The disciples have been traveling with Jesus for months, if not years. You would think that if anybody would have faith, it would be the disciples. And what would Jesus think about something like that? I wonder if Jesus wanted to respond, “Oh, you want me to increase your faith? OK, how about if I walk on water? Would that increase your faith? How about if I turn water into wine? Would that increase your faith? How about if I make a blind man see? Would that increase your faith? How about if I make a lame man walk? Would that increase your faith? How about if I raise Lazarus from the dead? Would that increase your faith? The disciples already had faith! Or they should have! Because they’d lived with Jesus for many months, if not years! How could they not have faith? And we can have faith. Because we can read about Jesus.

The Bible should increase our faith. When we read in Exodus, when Moses says, “Take care of the widow and the orphan,” that should increase our faith, shouldn’t it? If it said the opposite, if it said, “Oh, forget about the widow and the orphan. Don’t take care of them.” That would decrease our faith, wouldn’t it? Who wants to have faith in a religion that doesn’t help the widow and the orphan? So that should increase our faith. When we read in the prophet Micah 6:8: “Do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God,” that should increase our faith shouldn’t it? Because if it said the opposite, “Do injustice, hate kindness, and walk boastfully with God,” that would decrease our faith, wouldn’t it? And who wants to have faith in a religion that says, “Do injustice, hate kindness, and walk boastfully with God?” That would decrease our faith. The Bible should increase our faith.

The Grand Canyon should increase our faith. Kathleen and I went to the Grand Canyon recently. If you’ve been there, you know it’s spectacularly beautiful. We went down something called the Bright Angel Trail. I’m hoping it’s not named that because people have fallen off and are now bright angels. The trail goes down about a mile, it ends at the bottom of the canyon, but we only went about a hundred yards down. And I clutched the wall the whole way down. No guardrail? No thank you. But it was spectacular to see and before we walked along the Grand Canyon, they showed us a documentary. The documentary said that the Grand Canyon was formed over two billion years. Two billion years! And I got to thinking, what happened before that two billion years? Who created the evolutionary process that formed the Grand Canyon over two billion years? Well, many of us have faith that God did that, that God created the evolutionary process that over two billion years created the Grand Canyon. We have faith in that.

David tells us there’s something stronger than faith. In Psalm 46:10, David writes, on behalf of God, “Be still and know that I am God.” Now David didn’t write, “Be still and have faith that I am God.” David wrote, “Be still and know that I am God.” Because knowing is stronger than faith. When you know something is true, you don’t have to have faith that something is true. We know that two plus two equals four because we all had elementary school math, so we don’t have to have faith that two plus two equals four. We know that two plus two equals four. When we see an apple or an orange fall from a tree, like Newton, we know that gravity exists. We don’t have to have faith that gravity exists. We know that gravity exists. When we see that the weather is hotter every year, we know that there is global warming, that there’s climate change. We don’t have to have faith that there’s climate change, we know that there’s climate change. And knowing is stronger than faith.

Dr. Wayne Dyer died a little more than a year ago. He was seventy-five. Wayne Dyer wrote popular spiritual books like "Change Your Thoughts, Change Your Life." He was frequently on with Oprah and he was frequently on PBS. Wayne Dyer told Oprah a few years ago that he had leukemia. But he didn't go for orthodox treatment. He went for unorthodox treatment. He contacted someone name John of God in Brazil. John of God performed surgery on Wayne Dyer. Long distance surgery. John of God was in Brazil. Wayne Dyer was in Hawaii. John of God sent Wayne Dyer some spices and herbs and stuff that he had to drink, and he had to wear all white, and he had to lie in bed for 24 hours. After that, Wayne Dyer says he was cured. He told Oprah that he was cured. He wasn't going to go to his regular doctor to find out if his leukemia was gone. He knew that it was gone. He didn't have faith that it was gone. He knew that it was gone. Now when Wayne Dyer died, it was announced that he died of a heart attack. And I thought, well, OK, but what about the leukemia? Because I'm one who's really skeptical and says, "Mmmhmm, you know that your leukemia's gone because of that long distance surgery." Anyway, a little while later, I read that they did an autopsy on Wayne Dyer and the guy who said he knew that his leukemia was cured by long distance surgery, well, they didn't find any leukemia in his system when they did the autopsy. Knowing is stronger than faith. Wayne Dyer knew that his leukemia was gone and knowing is stronger than faith.

Love exists. I know that love exists. I've experienced love. I hope you have, too. I'm sure you have. When I was a little kid, my grandma would take me to Sunday School and church every Sunday. I knew my grandma loved me. And I loved my grandma. I experienced love from my grandma. And I've experienced love throughout my life. Today I know that I love my daughter, and I know my daughter loves me. I know that I love Kathleen, and I know that Kathleen loves me. You can't see love. You can't hear love. You can't touch love. You can't smell love. You can't taste love. But we can experience love and therefore we can know that love exists. According to the poem "Desiderata" by Max Ehrmann, he says, "Do not be cynical about love...for it is as perennial as the grass." In other words, it comes up every year. Love comes up every season. Love comes up every day. We know that love exists because we can experience love. And knowing is stronger than faith.

God exists. I know that God exists, because I have experienced God. I hope you have, too. When I was a little kid about seven years old, I was playing in my front yard all by myself, when all of a sudden I didn't feel all alone. I looked around, but I didn't see anyone and there was nobody there. But years later I thought: that was God. I was experiencing God. And I've experienced God many times since then. I experience God in church. I experience God in the shower. I experience God walking on the beach. I experience God walking in the woods. I experience God driving my car listening to the radio. I experience God in a crowd. I experience God all alone. So I know that God exists. I don't have to have faith that God exists, I know God exists because I've experienced God. You can't see God, you can't hear God, you can't touch God, you can't smell God, you can't taste God. Still, I've experienced God. The Bible says in I John 4:16, "God is love." That says to me, if you've ever experienced love, you've experienced God, because God is love. When you know that God exists, you don't have to have faith in God because knowing is stronger than faith.

What about you? Do you know that God exists? Do you have faith that God exists? I hope you have faith that God exists. I hope your faith that God exists increases. But I also hope, if you haven't already, that you experience God. Because if you experience God, you know that God exists. And knowing is stronger than faith. So my hope for you is that you have faith in God, that you experience God, and that you, if you haven't already, that you know God exists. Because knowing is stronger than faith.

Let us pray:  
God of love,  
Help us to have faith in you.  
Help us to experience you.  
And help us to know you.  
Now and forevermore,  
By the power of the Holy Spirit,  
And in the name of Jesus.  
Amen.

*(This sermon was delivered without manuscript or notes,  
and was transcribed from a tape recording of it.)*