

Dear Church,

I have been thinking a great deal in the past months about what it might mean to be a faithful people in the midst of this unprecedented moment in history. What are we being called to? What does faith look like now?

We have a weird way of talking about faith in modern American Christianity. Too often we treat it like it is an intellectual exercise, like it is about what we think. Modern Christian rhetoric employs phrases like “coming to faith” like faith is something we have, something we either possess or don’t. We tend to talk about faith like something we acquire, but what if instead faith is something we enact, that we embody, that we do? Not something that we do with our heads, but something we do with our hearts, and just as importantly our feet. What if faith is not about what we know, but about where we are willing to stand? What if faith is the trust that allows us to walk in the dark, uncertain if there will be light ahead? What if faith means undertaking ventures of which we cannot see the ending?

It is so much easier in these times to reach for certainty. We want answers, we want to know when we will be able to be together again, we want to not have to worry about sending our kids to school or whether it is safe to gather as a church. Certainty is comforting. It makes us feel like we have sure and solid ground beneath our feet and can be confident in stepping forward. But now we are called to move forward with no guarantees; now we are called to hope and to trust.

It reminds me a little bit of the story of Nicodemus - not the one where he comes to see Jesus at night burdened with the weight of questions and the desire to be right. But the story where he comes with Joseph of Arimathea to bury the crucified Christ. If there was ever a moment to give up on Jesus it’s after he’s been killed. This would be the time to say, I’m going back to my familiar surroundings where I can be comforted by my right answers, and rest comfortably in my certainty about the world and my place in it. But that is not what Nicodemus does. He risks exposure to come and bury this man in whom he had begun to place his hope. And he does this not knowing if there is a future in the Jesus movement. Only hoping. He does it without an ounce of certainty, only a whisper of trust. That’s faith.

Faith is not having the right answer. It is not knowledge without doubt and it is not blind belief. Faith is not certainty. Faith is moving in the dark. Faith is taking risks, real ones where the stakes matter. Faith is showing up, even when you don’t know how it will all turn out. And yes, certainty is so much easier than faith, but it is faith that God calls us to. I hope that we have the courage to keep showing up, to keep putting our willingness to step forward, not knowing how the story will end, about our craving for certitude. I hope that we are always willing to walk through the dark, trusting that the light is on its way.

-Pastor Emily