

Ordinary Time, Proper 14

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

—Hebrews 11:1 NRSV

Explore

Faith without Understanding

CD, phone, calculator, remote control, flashlight

Ask: “Is there something you don’t understand?” Hold up one item at a time, and ask how it works. Some students may know the answers, and others will not. The point is that we have faith that the items will work when we need them without questioning. Hold up a CD, phone, calculator, remote control, and a flashlight. Ask: “Do we expect them to work? Do we understand how they work, how the sound bytes are attached to a silver plastic disc, how our voices travel by way of fiber optics across the country, how numbers are manipulated by a computer chip, how pushing a button on the remote changes the channel? How do television signals even get to the TV? Or how does a simple battery cell produce light? Does it make a difference even if we don’t understand the science behind the technology?” Even though many of us don’t understand, we expect the technology to work. We have faith without understanding. Why, then, is faith difficult when it comes to the big questions? faith in God? faith in ourselves?

Extract

Bible

Abraham and Sarah: Templates for Faith

Hebrews 11:1–3
8–16

Genesis 12:1–3
15:1–15
17:1–8
17:15–24
18:1–15
21:1–8

Read the following scripture to the class and ask a volunteer to paraphrase it. “By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to set out for a place that he was to receive as an inheritance; and he set out, not knowing where he was going” (Hebrews 11:8 NRSV). Divide these scripture passages among the three groups and read more about Abraham in Genesis 12:1–3, 15:1–15, and 17:1–8. Have each group give a summary of their scripture.

Read the following scripture to the class and ask a volunteer to paraphrase it. “Through faith also Sarah herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised” (Hebrews 11:11 IV). Follow the directions from above to gain more understanding about Sarah. Read more about her in Genesis 17:15–24, 18:1–15, and 21:1–8.

What did Abraham and Sarah leave when they chose to follow God? Ur was an ancient city in Babylon. It was a world-trading seaport with a large population and was on many caravan trade routes. There were libraries, schools, and temples—the home of many gods and goddesses. It was old when Abraham was young.

In our scripture readings today, we find Abraham and Sarah to be senior citizens. (Can you imagine your grandparents in this role?) He was rich and established in the community. Yet, when God called Abraham to be faithful to only one God (monotheism), he left everything, following in faith. Abraham and Sarah had to trust in God’s promises. They experienced God reaching out to them in their present and their future. How would you describe the faith of Abraham and Sarah? What did their faith bring to their lives—obedience, trust, new experiences, adventure, comfort?

Faith
is the core
of discipleship.

What Is Faith?

What faith have you experienced? What is faith? Write the following activity on a flip chart or make copies for each student. Do the activity together, discussing the options as you go. Read Hebrews 11:1. Does this information change your discussion thoughts or is it about how the class described faith? On a flip chart write a class definition of faith.

Illustrations of Faith

Use a concordance to locate scriptures on faith. Look for people, situations, events, and symbols of faith. Use markers, paints, banner paper, or fabric to create an “Illustrations of Faith” banner or mural.

Faith and Healing

In the November 10, 2003, issue of *Newsweek*, there appeared the article, “Faith and Healing” by Claudia Kalb. If you can obtain the article, it would be a good one for students to divide, read, and discuss with one another. Take the true/false quiz compiled from the article, and use it in your discussion of faith. It is not necessary to have the magazine article to do this activity. Emphasize that discussions on faith are not limited to church settings.

What Is Faith?

1. a Greek word meaning assurance
2. a belief that a spiritual world is real
3. an important quality of a follower of Jesus
4. a gift from God
5. an opportunity to witness
6. a belief in God
7. a witness of God

True/False

1. There are university courses that teach students how to talk to patients about faith and illness.
2. More than half of the U.S. med schools offer courses like “Spirituality and Medicine.”
3. Seventy-two percent of Americans would like to talk with their doctors about faith.
4. Seventy-two percent believe that praying to God can cure a person even if the medical profession says no.
5. Eighty-four percent of Americans think prayers improve the chances for recovery.
6. Twenty-eight percent of the population surveyed thought that medicine and religion should be separate.
7. Millions of dollars are spent funding scientific research that explores the nature of God.
8. The average life expectancy of church goers is longer.
9. Going to church promotes healthy habits.
10. All of the above answers are true.

copies “What is Faith” quiz, flip chart, markers

concordance, scriptures, markers, paints, banner paper, or fabric

Where Will We Be Found Faithful?

People of God are always on the frontier. A healthy religion has an adventuresome spirit, a lot of faith, a willingness to risk, and can challenge old ideas while moving out with new ones. If not, the faith would die for lack of growth. Disciples of Christ will search out opportunities to apply their faith, because it is the foundation of Christian life. On the paper provided, respond to the question, “Where will I be found faithful?”

Challenge: Change your life to follow God, not knowing where that might lead. Trust is faith. It is crucial for the walk on the path of the disciple, it strengthens us as we grow in our commitment, provides confidence in the future, and helps us understand more of the Divine.

Lectionary scriptures—Isaiah 1:1, 10–20; Psalm 50:1–8, 22–23; Hebrews 11:1–3, 8–16; Luke 12:32–40/12:35–47 IV