

What is invisible, silent, has no scent, no mass but is of the greatest value to God.

FAITH. I want to talk about faith today, what it is, how much God values it and how to exercise it, it fact how to exercise it even when you have been disappointed.

Two years ago I went to Blue Mountain Camp with my son William and as part of the week's activities we did a high ropes course. I hate heights, I get nervous up here on the stage. I've overcome my fear, but I loathe heights, I've never done a bungee jump, never done sky diving, heights are just not my thing, they get my stomach churning in that horrible way when I look out over the edge.

So I was at camp and there was a log up 500 ft (probably about 5 metres actually) and held the rope for the kids as they went up, as they climbed the ladder and teetered out onto the pole and then let them down. And at the end it was my turn. I clipped on and started climbing the ladder, actually once I was passed head height the ladder wasn't too bad. But I got to the top and then I had to step out onto the pole. I had to overcome my fear and I had to trust, to have faith in the kids that were belaying me. Faith is that invisible transaction within your brain and your soul where you chose to trust someone. There has to be a risk factor to it otherwise it's not faith.

I want to talk about that tiny little synaptic jump that constitutes faith or sometimes trust.

That is what God is looking for from you. It's tiny but it can turn an entire life, it is not wishful thinking, it is not analogous to a like on Facebook, it is a decision of trust resulting in action.

How about you, do you know what it is like to have faith in someone,

to trust someone or perhaps to trust a brand. Perhaps you know what it is like to trust and have that trust let down. I think of those poor people who trusted in Bella Vista Homes, they trusted the company and they had faith in the Tauranga City Council and they were let down. I think of the whole slew of investment advisors rampant in the 90's who were selling Bridgecorp, Bluechip, all sort of different and risk investments that then went belly up. Faith is significant, it affects our future, it can relate to our life savings or to our house or educations. Some experiences are enough to put your trust muscles into reverse. But that action of trusting and having faith is of the greatest value to God.

Hebrews 11.6 Without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

Let's go back to the tragic story of the woman Jesus encountered.

Jesus was on his way to help someone else and she reached out and touched the edge of his garment. It seems that perhaps she was trying to do so unseen, she had decided perhaps that he had a great deal of power in him and if she could just touch him that would be enough. Jesus feels the power go out of him and she is healed and then he makes a scene. In some ways this was unusual for Jesus, often he wouldn't make a scene, he'd tell people who he had healed, to keep it quiet. He took people away to quiet places to heal them. But this time he makes a scene? Why? Why does he make a scene? And it all relates around these few words. "Your faith has made you well". Obviously Jesus was wanting to make a big deal about that. About her faith. It wasn't her

money; it wasn't some magical spell or potion. It was her faith, that infinitesimally small action in her spirit. That's what Jesus wanted to focus on.

Let me summarise, it wasn't magic nor medication it was faith.

Let's be clear about the woman's ailment,

she likely had a gynaecological problem where she was menstruating constantly, that's what this phrase meant in the bible. She was bleeding all the time, she was ceremonially unclean, so she couldn't go to temple or synagogue, she was likely isolated from her family, she'd have low iron so she's be exhausted, she'd have got so far beyond embarrassed. This poor lady was in all sorts of strife.

Now Mark gives us a few more details: 5.26, She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had, yet instead of getting better she grew worse.

Now before we put her in a first century box, let's acknowledge that these sorts of issues are still real today and God cares about them. Menstrual problems, but let's just widen our thoughts for a moment. Bowel problems it is not unheard of to have bleeding from the bowel and I run across a lot of men with prostate problems. All of these intensely private illnesses.

I wanted to say that and make sure we are sympathetic before my next section. She's been to all the doctors.

The Talmud

which is written record of Jewish oral tradition lists 11 cures for a flow of blood, again these would be funny if you didn't think gosh that could be me. Here's 3 of them,

"Take of the gum of Alexandria the weight of a small silver coin; of alum the same; of crocus the same. Let them be bruised together, and given in wine to the woman that has the issue of blood."

"If this does not benefit take three pints of Persian onions; boil them in wine, and give her to drink, and say, 'Arise from thy flux.'"

"If this does not cure her, set her in a place where two ways meet, and let her hold a cup of wine in her right hand, and let someone come behind and frighten her, and say, 'Arise from thy flux.'"

The Talmud starts with a mix of herbal potion, but ends up with something that sounds a lot like a magic spell.

You see this is what the woman would have experienced. Every potion under the sun, every natural remedy available, the best the doctors had and a whole lot of mumbo jumbo.

I remember wishful thinking as a kid, if I just squeeze my toes as I jump off the wall I'll be able to fly.

And she had spent all her money.

This is the context that the woman came from, and so Jesus made a big deal of how he healed her.

What he could have said, I didn't heal you with onions, I didn't heal you because you gave me money, especially I didn't heal you because you touched my tassel in the right way.

[Instead it's like he looks into her face and say.](#)

That moment when you took a chance of believing in me. When you had faith in me. That that tiny transaction in your head. That's what healed you, having faith in me. Again he didn't say actually it was me who healed you in response to that act of faith!!!!

I've always struggled with the words that Jesus used here and elsewhere – your faith has made you well. It's always sounded to me like, the quality or the quantity of your faith is what has made the difference. I had this blinding flash of understanding 2 weeks ago when I heard Martin McAlay describing this. Jesus didn't mean YOUR faith, he means your FAITH. Not your money, not your actions, not drinking this potion, not touching the corner of the temple. But your faith.

[Faith as much as a mustard seed is all it takes.](#)

That's what Jesus goes on to say Mt 17.20 You see it is our faith that is Gold to God.

I heard a friend recently say that the whole internet weighs about as much as a mid-sized pineapple, the electrons etc.

And what I find so helpful about that, is when we are healed, it's not because of the work we have done repeating 1000 prayers, or giving \$10,000 to the church (However - Gifts are welcome) It's our simple act of faith and God's Grace. Sometimes he heals and sometimes he doesn't

And the same when he doesn't it's not because we haven't believed enough. I have met so many people over the years who have been sick and felt condemned because they hadn't believed enough to be healed. It's not a quantity of faith question.

God desires us to have faith in him, to believe in him, to trust in him; and as life goes on part of the challenge and growth of discipleship is having faith in him, even when the thing that we had faith for last time didn't work out.

[I shared with you a few weeks ago](#)

when I was talking about Joy, that I had allowed my name to go forward to possibly become Moderator of the General assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Aotearoa NZ. I had shared how to have joy you have to take risks. And I wanted to give you a real example. Well I took the risk, and it didn't work out. There were 6 of us on the ballot and it needed to reduce to 4 and I missed out in the first round. And it was gutting, I was deeply disappointed, and quite frankly a bit disappointed with God. "Why did you talk me into letting my name go forward when this was going to happen?" I can be quite frank with God, I was hurt.

But I will trust again, I will trust that he had a purpose in what he did, maybe another time, maybe God has a different way for me to serve that he will present in time.

Faith is not faith if it doesn't hurt when it doesn't work out.

So if you are praying for healing it will be upsetting if it doesn't happen, but sometimes it does and not because we piled up enough prayers, or did a deal with God.

Our faith is like Gold to God.

Matt 9

has three more stories of healings can we look at 9.2, 9.22 and 9.29 Can three people read those out for us please. All I want you to see is that value on your faith.

When I was a young man

I fell head over heels in love with a girl, I thought she was the most beautiful woman I had ever seen – I still do. Thought she was kind and smart and good hearted. And I prayed to God, please let her love me. Let her chose me. Let her return my love. Now I could talk about love maturing. But do you know what I mean about when you love someone, and you just wish they would love you.

Well faith is a bit like that. God loves you, with the overwhelming love of a parent, and his deepest desire is for you to love him in return, and that love is faith, believing he exists and trusting in him.

Two guide rails

Now faith is what the reformers were so excited about, but I want to hold two guide rails up for you. On one side we have the early Christian leader Paul writing in Galatians that our salvation is by faith alone, our salvation can't be bought with a bunch of money, it can't be bought with a special spell, it can't be attained by great medicine and especially not by cryogenic suspension that sounds like hell to me. Our salvation our life with God depends on our faith, or that infinitesimal small response to the overwhelming grace of God. My professors were all about the faithfulness of Christ. But I am a Christian before I am a Calvinist I think we need to make that tiny response of faith, in healing and in salvation.

As I said last week I believe that god honours our choice and that there is a world around us of people who are not saying yes to God's love, and he will not force them. Without faith there can be no salvation. But we are free moral agents and we can encourage people to say yes to God.

So on one side the handrail, it's faith alone, not by the works of any moral code. Like the lady with the flux, it's not sitting where two roads meet with a cup of wine in your hand and saying the right words. You can say all the right words but without faith – it's meaningless.

On the other side there is the hand rail of James and the reformers struggled with James, because it looks like he's saying, it's not just faith you have to do something about it as well. The way that I understand this is that the tiny act of faith, way to have weight, it has to have consequence. Do you know the difference between liking world vision of Facebook or putting your credit card number in and giving some money. Liking world vision is not having faith in them. That's what I believe James gives us. Faith is not fluffy. Faith means I am going to turn my life on this decision.

So Galatians in one hand – faith alone, but James in the other hand –but real faith with consequences

Let me draw this together. God loves our faith like Gold. Believing in him is the sort of a journey with him.

But what about those of us who have been at it a bit longer? Maybe with God, but perhaps even more maybe with other Christians, what do we do when we have had faith and then been hurt.

I listened to Carey Nieuwhof

while I was on study leave, talking about ministry. And he talked about how many people drop out of ministry after 10 years. He said they quit, they have a moral failure, they settle or they thrive. Want to thrive. And he said the key to that is knowing that people will often hurt you, but loving them anyway. Faith when you know it might hurt. That's the kind of faith God Sees as gold.

Will you have that faith in God, even though you are afraid.

Will you have that faith even if the illness you have is not going to be cured. My friend Tim Lee has just taken on a job to work with Simon Cornwall at Rotorua doing some preaching. Tim broke his back and is a tetraplegic. He has to believe in God every day to get through every day. His is a physical illness, other have mental illnesses, where you have to believe in God every day to get through.

And for others we need to believe that God is good despite the painful things sometimes done to us. Will you with me chose to believe in God, put your faith in him and in what he is doing through us. Through St Peters.

Prayer.