



## It's a Matter of Faith

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Hebrews 11:1-3, 1-16; Luke 12:32-40

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It's all about faith, according to Hebrews and it's faith that undergirds the gospel promises. Faith will provide and restore the fullness of life, secure us now and into the future. Faith will enable us to imagine as yet unknown possibilities and walk into them.

How do we know we have faith? Is it even something to be had?

For faith, Douglas Hall reminds us, is a verb. We don't 'have' faith in something such as an image of God or Jesus. We *faith*." The Greek word *pistis* in the New Testament that's translated as faith, Karen Armstrong suggests might be better translated as 'trust.' "Faith does not require information, knowledge and certainty, but a free surrender and a joyful bet on [God's] unfelt, untried and unknown goodness."

So faith is about trust and letting go, without any pre-secured guarantees, without any prenup agreement and without fully knowing the God you trust. It suggests faith's not an acquisition but a posture of trust. A willingness to be vulnerable, open to transformation, not a process of self-determination.

I can't imagine a lot of buy-in for such a notion these days. Perhaps especially in the bubble of the West we live in. We learn early on that success is a competitive game. Resources are scarce so we need to make best advantage of what we have, with minimal and strategic care for our neighbour, ensuring we're not overtaxed.

In light of this I wonder how many of us “faith.” It’s a flimsy proposition, especially when the world’s such a challenging place to live just now. Or at least a challenging place to live with hope and not be fear-shadow overwhelmed.

At the moment we’re reading through chapter 12 of Luke. It’s full of reminders not to fear, which suggests the first hearers of the gospel must have had reason to fear many things. God’s concerned even with the hairs of your head, fear of an uncertain future causes us to stash possessions and disregard the needs of others. Reassuring words are offered, “It isn’t necessary to be anxious about life and death (human finitude) or about food and clothing (earthly possessions). These are human means of protection and well-being but they compare little with God’s [abundance]. Worrying about them will not make a difference, in one’s life or in one’s death.”<sup>1</sup> But we do worry. We can be weighed down by all that seems hard and outside our control.

I’m curious about this, the dis-ease and discomfort we experience - of the world as a hard place to live, of being overshadowed by the endless flow of distressing news.

Not wishing to be the proverbial Grinch but it **is** the way the world is, it’s perhaps **always** been like this. We think we live in unprecedented times, yet I think history attests we live in some repeat times here, as much as we’d like to think we’ve progressed.

So why aren’t we simply resolved to this being the way of things? Why does this uneasy discomfort arise in us? Is there something in us that imagines, perhaps hopes, we’re not inevitably condemned to such outcomes? Is there something in us, perhaps deep and unexamined, nudging us? A ‘knowing’ things can be different, there are other options and we can participate in making them real? It would be easy to Pollyanna from the position of privilege we occupy. But I know people who live in much more challenging contexts also find ways to

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<sup>1</sup> Audrey West Feasting on the Word Year C volume 3, 337

come together, to act to alleviate the suffering of one another, to change the outcomes as far as they can make possible.

We have presented to us so many realities of a world in disrepair and despair. This appears to be the way things are, how it is. But these stories are told to exert influence. As with any human rhetoric they're not innocent. They're told in a way that can lead us to hopelessness, helplessness and defeat, render us powerless before what we could almost be persuaded is the inevitable.

Yet, who decides what is inevitable?

The gospel stories are also told to influence, they're not innocent, they may help balance us.

Today's gospel has Jesus say, "Sell your possessions and give alms." Audrey West writes "The passage challenges us with a simple test: Do we live lives of taking or do we want to live lives of giving? The answer we give reveals the truth of our hearts and opens (or closes) us to the blessings that God [gives]."<sup>2</sup>

So is there another way to influence the telling of the way things are, of where we go from here and what is possible? The future's yet to be determined. It **will** be influenced by the intention and energy of now. A collective intention and energy that admits our vulnerability and allows that some sort of transformation is required of us (else we'll likely simply repeat what we know), can determine a future different from what we know. This kind of transformation isn't something we acquire by dint of will, to grasp and achieve, rather it asks us to let go and open ourselves to that deeper knowing already in us and be guided by it.

In Audrey West's words "The less we want to have, the less we need to have. The less we need to have, the less we need to fear. The less we

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 338

need to fear, the more we know that a life of giving allows us always to live, not on the brink of destruction, but on the brink of blessing.”<sup>3</sup>

It takes courage, we need companions to discern with us and for mutual support as we trust ourselves to transformation. We thus **become** the story of open handed giving, living expectantly on the brink of blessing we influence to make this real in world.

Who decides what is inevitable?

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 338