

GROWING Together

15th Series

GROWING: THROUGH DOUBT TO FAITH

Everyone has doubts. Did Jesus really rise from the dead?; Where was God when I needed comfort?; How could a loving God let this happen? In our scientific age, there are gaps between what we have been taught by faith and what we experience happening in the world.

Some people believe that if we have enough faith, we won't ask these questions or that bad things will never happen. We suppress doubt, believing that faithful people should not question their beliefs. We experience the fear that God has abandoned us. We believe that we are somehow stepping out beyond the love of God. But is this true?

The Bible is filled with stories of people struggling with their doubts and faith. The psalmist freely expresses anger, fear and doubt. Psalm 77 speaks of this kind of trial. After describing a state of profound doubt the writer says: "Has God forgotten to be gracious? Has he in his anger shut up his compassion?" And I say, "It is my grief that the right hand of the Most High has changed." (Ps 77:9-10 NRSV) Even Jesus, on the Cross, questioned God's faithfulness in the words "My God, My God, Why have you forsaken me?" How painful these questions are. The sense that we may be losing touch with the God we have loved and trusted adds to our distress and unease.

Faith is a gift from God. And the ability to challenge and to question our own belief system is a sign of a growing and transforming faith. Often we believe that we alone form our faith; we fail to let God form it with and in us. God provides the transformation and we need to cherish the process by which God leads us to deeper conviction.

Doubt is usually a sign that our faith is changing and growing. Asking questions is a natural part of life which leads us to reaffirm our faith under changing circumstances: from youth to adulthood, from middle age to elderhood. Each stage of a person's spiritual journey has value and importance, and as we move from one to another what we believe will change as well. The faith of childhood may not sustain an adult world view; the adult commitment

to future generations requires a shift from the self involvement of youth. If our faith is to grow, we need to embrace God's transforming power. Even though we may feel empty or lost, what we have believed in the past can be the foundation for our renewed faith.

Through particular life experiences, each of us needs to dare to explore the depth and breadth of our faith. The faith that says good things will happen to good people may move to a faith that gives thanks for God's presence in the time of trial or pain. The faith that depends on instant gratification may have to learn patience and perspective in a time of waiting. The faith that depends on other people may need to find its comfort in solitude.

Trusting God with our doubt may be one of the most difficult spiritual events of our lives. Yet, to grow as people of faith, we are bound to experience the grace of doubt.

*I said to the man who stood
at the gate of the year:
"Give me a light that I may tread
safely into the unknown."
And he replied:
"Go out into the darkness
and put your hand into the hand of God.
That shall be to you better than light
and safer than a known way."*

Minnie Louise Haskins (1875 – 1957)

The Growing Together 1999 writing team is Garth Ewert Fisher (Mennonite), Nicholas Jesson (Roman Catholic), Sister Anne Keffer (Lutheran), Rev. Betty-Lynn Schwab (United), and Rev. Helen Tervo (Anglican). Our editor is Frank Roy.

GROWING TOGETHER is a series of five monthly Sunday bulletin inserts for the ecumenical education of Christ's faithful.



Gathering the Family of Jesus

Saskatoon Centre for Ecumenism
250 B Second Avenue South
Saskatoon, SK S7K 1K9
(306) 653-1633

© 1999