

When Faith Wavers

Pentecost 9 (Proper 14C)

Written by Penny Duffy

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Help me God. Help me. Help me. Help me. Help me survive the night. Help me believe in you. "Faith--the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen . . ." Paul says to the Hebrews in today's Epistle. Yet, who among us has not at one time or another questioned our Faith? Is there really a God or are we adrift in a universe devoid of meaning?

I have questioned my faith at times, including very recently. It is frightening, upending and deeply troubling. We can't prove the existence of God any more than we can prove God does not exist.

As humans, we typically seek proof through our senses — things we can see, hear, touch. Yet, consider the eagle whose visual acuity is five times stronger than ours. What does an eagle see that we are blind to? Or the dog who hears auditory frequencies far above our range and the elephant attuned to ones far below it. What do they hear that we are missing? Both the tiny winged bat and the giant sperm whale navigate via biologic sonar, a sense we lack entirely. All of these creatures experience the world in ways "unseen" to us.

Of course, we don't rely entirely on our senses for proof of concept. We trust mathematical proofs to derive the laws of, say, quantum mechanics. These are matters of intellect. Even so, mystery abounds. We look at the images from the Webb telescope and see stars being born and stars dying—billions of years ago. How can we in the present witness the past happening in real time?

Or consider the theory of nonlocality, also known as "entanglement," or what Einstein called "spooky action at a distance." It holds and has demonstrated that subatomic particles billions of light years apart in the universe can affect each other — *instantaneously*.

When we encounter such mystery, we are thrust into another realm altogether — the realm not of the mind but of the spirit, where awe and wonder dwell. A realm that defies time and space as we know it, like that time you sensed a friend far away was in trouble, and you were right. Or you decided not to cross that street seconds before a car ran a red light. Those are what we might call personal experiences of "spooky action at a distance."

Mystery is also there in times of transcendence, when you experienced nature's power or beauty, or in a moment of creative inspiration, or in an unexpected act of kindness or courage *so selfless* it took your breath away. Took your words away, too.

Paul goes on to say, "By faith we understand that the worlds" (note the use of the plural there—not just one world, but *worlds*) "were prepared by the *word* of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible." Made by the word of God. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God," the Gospel of John tells us. Words, of course, are symbols through which we organize and convey our experience so that we can navigate life and live in community.

The idea that there is more than one world suggests worlds in time and space that are unavailable to our understanding. The idea that these worlds were prepared by the *word* of God, suggest that what

was made by God, what is ever-evolving through God, what in fact *is* God, can only understood by us as a symbol — a symbolic form for that which there are no human words.

But faith wavers. Symbols fail us. Doubt seeps in. Lost, desperate, hopeless, we finally fall to our knees, let ourselves cry out. Help me. Help me. Help me. And in that whispered cry, we are unwittingly appealing to something larger than ourselves, something we cannot know directly. Humility enters in. And with it a giving over, a resignation to our *limited* view. And with that resignation comes a stillness, and dwelling in it, we sense the tiniest ounce of faith return, as soundless as the flutter of butterfly wing.

Our breathing slows. We take in a deep, ragged breath — *Yah*. We hold it and let it out slowly — *Weh*. *Yah-weh*. Yahweh. The word for which there are no words. The breath of God. The being of God.

What is seen is made from things invisible. What is heard is made from things inaudible. What is known is beyond our knowing. And maybe returning to that starting point returns us to God.

Let us pray.

Oh Lord, when we struggle to hold onto our faith, you are with us. By your word the worlds were created, are sustained, have evolved and will evolve in ways beyond our knowing. Yahweh. Breath of our breath. Life of our life. In our darkest moments, give us, we pray, the humility to open ourselves to you — to breathe you in — elemental, constant, infinite, in a world without end. Amen.

--Penny Duffy