

Hallelujah . . . for the uncertain ones.

I have a confession to make. I don't always *believe* what I say to you.

There are times when the words you hear from me on a Sunday morning stay too close to my lips. They struggle to make their way deeper into my being. Oh, I'm not lying or speaking meaningless platitudes with those words. I'm trying hard to offer meaningful truth through them. However, sometimes I find myself needing to really *hear* my own words, needing them to foster my *own* growth and transformation, needing them to push my *own* spiritual development, in much the same way you might hear them. I become aware once again of my own questions, doubts and uncertainties.

Truly, I would *like* to be more certain about the substance of my Christian faith. I expect that a rock-solid certainty would be more comfortable sometimes. It might make my tougher life-experiences easier to handle and less troublesome. It might make my ministry among you stronger in some ways. But if "belief" is taken to mean "utter certainty", as it seems to be for many people, then I find myself quite a distance from *that* kind of belief.

On Sunday mornings I talk about faith with those of you who seat yourselves throughout the Knox sanctuary. I talk with you about the journey, about a direction for our lives, our call toward justice, God's reality within our living, and other such things. Deep theological things, sometimes. Meaningful life-things, sometimes. Transformational things, sometimes. But ... more often than I'd wish, I struggle to catch and hold and 'believe' (in that sense of utter certainty) the very spiritual notions which I'm setting before you. I *want* the reality of the cosmos to be as I describe it on Sunday mornings, but too often I'm less than *sure* that it is so.

It may not really be so great a confession. It's an admission that I too am a human being, and that my spirit dances on the thin spring ice of doubts and uncertainties as much as yours or anyone's. I hope you don't find that such uncertainty within your church minister is too disturbing, because many church ministers are those who, with their own woundedness, with their own uncertainties, with their own spiritual scars, are journeying toward their own healing and wholeness, even while working to offer healing and transformation to others around them. That's the way it is with me.

For you with uncertainties dotting the landscape of your faith, or questions you're itching to take up with God someday, or concerns about what you can't believe even though you've heard that you should, there is good news. Uncertainty doesn't mean weakness. Even with your uncertainty, you too can minister to others. 'Minister' is a word meaning 'servant'. Certain or questioning, solid or seeking, you too can be a servant of God's call to heal wounds wherever you find them, a servant of Jesus' discipleship to strive for justice in an unjust world, and a servant of the Spirit's powerful impetus toward fullness of life for all creation.

At this time of year, just after Easter, I sometimes become a little downhearted at my less-than-certain faith, what some conservative Christians would even call a *lack* of faith. "Surely," I tell myself, "with all the wonder, intensity and spiritual high of the Easter celebrations, *now* is when I should find myself on a rock-solid faith foundation. Haven't I meant what I said through this Lenten journey to Easter?"

"Yes," I can truthfully respond, "I *meant* what I said." I meant what I said about God setting a direction for living into the very fabric of our being. I meant what I said about the giftedness of having all that we need for our ministry – if we honestly look for it. I meant what I said about the church being a community 'owned' by God's mission toward fullness of life for all. I meant what I said about you and I together *being* the Easter message in all we say and do. I meant all of that. But I sometimes struggle to be *certain* of it all, to act on it, and to truly build my life around it as a deep and abiding reality. I'm a learner and a seeker on my own journey of faith, just like you.

Maybe still being on that journey is not such a bad thing. When we're filled with certainty, when we 'believe' in a too-hard and too-fast way, then maybe we don't have to work at faith any more. It no longer has any challenge for us; it makes no more demands on us to change or grow. When we imagine we have no more questions without answers, and no more answers seeking questions, then we can shut down our minds and go into spiritual auto-pilot, having given our journey all the attention and effort it would seem to need. When we think we're utterly sure what our faith means for our lives and those of others, then there are no more ethical or theological or spiritual decisions we need to make. We can delude ourselves that we have 'arrived', and that there is no more journeying to be done.

Faith isn't like that. Faith makes room for doubt and questioning. Faith calls for action and movement even with the questioning. Faith's opposite is not doubt. Faith's opposite is *certainty*.

Thankfully, faith is what Easter feeds and nurtures. Perhaps certainty doesn't even need Easter, but faith needs Easter a lot. The deep truths of Easter – truths beyond the bare stories of the Gospels – flow around and through the shaky walls of our inner house of faith, strengthening them every time. Easter abounds with mystery, and that inner house of faith has room for mystery. Easter calls its message of hope into dim corners of our spirit, and our house of faith brightens with that hope. Easter invites trust in the truth of an unbreakable relationship with the Holy, and our house of faith needs trust ... it grows with trust.

Easter is not lessened because of faith's uncertainties. In fact, Easter becomes larger, more awesome, and even more powerful *because* of uncertainties. We *need* Easter. Without Easter and times like it, faith might wither and fade. In Easter moments, the Holy touches and holds our spirit in an even firmer embrace than usual. Easter moments throughout our lives keep our faith lively, passionate and open to newness. Easter moments insist that our inconsistent, uncertain and sometimes stumbling faith grows and matures, feeding our lives, our spirits and our world ever more deeply, even though that faith is less than complete.

Perhaps Easter isn't primarily for those with certainty anyway. Easter may be mostly for those of us whose faith makes its way with mystery and hope and trust and, yes, uncertainty. For that, what can we say but, "Hallelujah!"

