

July 25 – Leader’s Guide “Forming Faith to Apprehend True Life” John 4:43-54

1. How do people in the wider Canadian culture define faith? Do they see any value in it?

Most people seem to see faith as wishful thinking – or something that would require you to check your brain at the door.

Others see a danger in faith as you are appealing to a higher authority to back up your convictions around things. This has led people with faith convictions to believe what a particular culture calls evil is actually good (eg. Think of our culture’s repulsion toward absolute truth claims as they are seen to undermine the tolerance that is seen as key for a functioning society). This has led people with faith convictions to believe what a particular culture calls good is actually evil (eg. Think of the cultural battle grounds of abortion, human sexuality, and euthanasia)

Some may acknowledge personal benefit to having faith – for to believe you are known and loved by a particular deity can bring beneficial feelings into people’s lives – but rarely will they see or acknowledge a societal benefit to having faith.

Read John 4: 43-54

2. What does this father see as his greatest need? What does Jesus see as this man’s greatest need?

The father sees his greatest need as his son being made well

Jesus sees his greatest need as faith – trust – belief.

3. Faith is rooted in what you can see. The official perhaps has heard about Jesus from his neighbours, perhaps even seen him heal with his own eyes. Christian faith begins with what we can see, what we can verify. What can be seen, what is verifiable about the Christian faith? How does this run counter to how many view faith?

Contrary to popular understanding faith is neither wishful thinking, nor does it require us to check our brains at the door. It first begins in what is verifiable – namely – the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

This is yes the beginning place of faith but it cannot stay there. For little change can come into our lives based on what can be seen – all it usually produces is intellectual assent “Yes those things happened”. Such faith is oriented to the past.

In order to bring change into our lives faith must be oriented to the future. Based on what can be seen, can be verified, I will live and act in these ways into the future.

4. Jesus responds to the official’s request by creating a situation that is utterly agonizing for him. Not only his initial dismissiveness, his refusal to go down with him, but also sending him on a tormented two day walk home not sure what he will find there. There are at least two ways his faith is deepened as a result of this response:

- I. He begins to grow into a faith that believes before he sees. This is the direction Jesus sends him on when he says – Go your son will live – believe before you see. Do you have examples in our own lives where our faith grows as we believe before we see?

Here is the relevant section of the sermon to help guide your conversation:

Perhaps it would help to consider it this way – personal relationships are deepened when we trust before we see right? Let's say you are developing a new friendship. You discover that they are empathetic and a great listener. You are seeing these attributes in them and you are trusting in them – you see and believe. Then something drastic happens in your life, and you need the relief of talking to someone about it as well receiving wisdom from someone outside of the situation. It must be however someone who can keep the strictest of confidences. Who do you talk to? You think of this new friend, but you haven't seen whether they have wisdom to give you or are able to keep your confidence. So what do you do?

One of your options would be to take the risk to share the situation with them - to trust before you see. But it isn't blind trust or wishful thinking for it is a trust rooted in what you already know of them. The result? All being well, the relationship will deepen as we trust before we see.

This is how Jesus is inviting the father, inviting us, to deeper faith. Based on what you already know, based on what you already seen – go your son will live - believe before you see.

What does this look like practically?

It is when we obey not because we have become convinced that the command is in our best interest, but because we trust the one who commands us.

It is when we sacrifice our resources for the sake of others because we trust our future to the one who has laid down everything for us.

It is when we let go of our detailed plans to pursue an unknown future because we trust the one who calls us.

- II. The official first believes because of the benefits that Jesus brings into his life. (vs. 50) He believed the word that Jesus spoke to him, meaning he believed the outcome, what he wanted Jesus to do for him. However, when the servants tell him his son is well and that it happened at the very hour Jesus spoke – he believed. It seems he now has a faith that desires Jesus for his own sake rather than the benefits that Jesus brings. Do we have examples in our own lives of our faith growing from desiring the benefits Jesus brings to desiring Jesus himself? What impact does such a faith have on our lives?

Here was the relevant illustration that may help guide some of the discussion.

When you first meet someone in a romantic sense you often first fall in love with the benefits that person brings into your life. Perhaps they look good on your arm, giving you a sense of your own worth and value because they're with you. Or their job or financial

status opens up a lifestyle you have always yearned for. Or their sense of humour and drive for life brings you joy and vitality. You love them at first for the benefits they bring to you, but if that doesn't move to loving them for their own sake that relationship is doomed isn't it?

I mean time and age will take their looks, they won't look as good on your arm as they once did. Perhaps circumstance takes away the job, the money and the lifestyle can no longer be sustained. Declining mental health may diminish the joy and humour they brought in your life. Unless you love them for their own sake rather than what they give you that relationship will have no future.

Faith must grow from desiring the benefits Jesus brings to desiring Jesus for his own sake.

Further comment: This deepening brings us to the possession of a faith that is disconnected from circumstance. It moves us away from saying "I will have faith when things are going as I would want them to". Rather this kind of faith sees Jesus as ultimately precious because circumstance has no bearing on faith. Instead we may find that difficult circumstances actually push us more into the joy of knowing Jesus.

Read John 20:30-31

5. "Go your son will live." Jesus uses here the Greek word for life – Zoe – which is the divine life of God. It is a life death cannot extinguish, the life of the new creation, the life of an eternal future. This is the same word for life that John uses in what you just read. How is this far more precious than what the father first asked for? Do you now see why Jesus sees faith as his greatest need?

6. What is the impact on our lives, our relationships, our world when we apprehend Zoe by faith?

I'll combine the notes from the last two questions as they are related

Zoe is not just about eternal life, a life beyond the grave. Though it includes that it goes far beyond that. Zoe is to have the life of the new creation come to reside in us – this is the life of God that changes us from one degree of splendor to another as we are incrementally changed so that we might resemble the goodness, the holiness of God.

It is also the life of the future that God is bringing into our world. A future where there is no more pain, sorrow, and illness, where justice and peace flourish. This life animates us to live in anticipation of that future in all we do and say and pray.

So it indeed impacts every aspect of our lives and our relationships.

As examples: 1. It brings us to say - I will invest my time and energy and resources in those things which will last into eternity.

2. If the future has no divisions between people – charting courses toward reconciliation in our personal relationships is in step with that future.