

Faith Is a Verb
Choosing Crazy
May 29, 2022

Good morning everyone!

Thank you so much for making the effort on this holiday weekend to be onsite with us – either here in the room or down the hall in the café.

And thank you to everyone watching online, especially if you're fortunate enough to be on vacation somewhere.

As I've said many times in recent days ...

- This is an incredibly important moment in the life of our church.
- And if this *is* your church, it matters that you stay connected to what's going on – even if you're out of town or on vacation.

So, again thanks for the effort. I appreciate it.

And I think it's safe to say that Jesus appreciates it, too, because, after all, *this* church is *His* church, not ours.

Now, if you're with us today for the first time or the first time in a long time, you're probably wondering, "what the heck is this guy talking about?"

I'll get to that in just a bit.

Understanding "Faith"

But first, as Andrew said earlier, today we're beginning a new series called *Faith Is a Verb*.

And for the grammaticists among us (people who care about correct grammar), I realize that "faith" is not *literally* a verb. It's a noun.

But I chose that title for the series because of the point I hope will become crystal clear over the next month or so.

You see, when it comes to the idea of “faith,” a lot of us – and I’m speaking primarily to Christians when I say this, but I think it applies even those who are not believers in and followers of Jesus ...

And, by the way, if that’s where you are spiritually, I’m glad you feel comfortable enough to be here with us or watching online.

When it comes to the idea of faith, many of us – Christian and non – have a very narrow and, quite frankly, unhealthy understanding of what “faith” is.

And because of that, we end up shortchanging ourselves.

- For those of us who are Christians, we miss out on a huge (and exciting!) aspect of what it means to follow Jesus in everyday life.
- For those who are not Christians, our limited understanding skews our view of God.

It keeps us from seeing the whole picture and maybe even creates an unnecessary barrier when “faith” doesn’t “work” like we think it’s supposed to.

Point being ...

Regardless of your spiritual status, an incomplete understanding of “faith” can be hazardous to your health!

It will hold you back. It will shortchange you. It will mess you up.

And I don’t want that for you.

So, what I want to do in this series is to help you broaden your definition.

More specifically, over the next month or so, I want to illustrate the aspect of faith that most people tend to overlook, which is *faith as a verb*.

Here's what I mean.

Most people think of faith in two ways.

1. First of all, “faith” is a set of beliefs.

Have you ever heard someone say something like, “well, my faith teaches me that X is true”?

That's this kind of faith. It defines a set of beliefs.

Earlier, we sang a song that's a great example of this.

We believe in God the Father.

We believe in Jesus Christ.
We believe in the Holy Spirit.
And He's giving us new life.

We believe in the crucifixion.
We believe that He conquered death.
We believe in the resurrection.
And He's comin' back again.

I mean, if you're looking for a concise definition of "the Christian faith" you can't do much better than that.

So, that's one way that people think about "faith." It's a set of beliefs.

Another way people tend to think about "faith" – and this is probably the predominant understanding these days ...

- Especially among Christians ...

- And even *more especially* among Christians who listen to a lot of contemporary worship music ...
- Because this is the kind of faith that most contemporary Christian artists write about and sing about.

2. “Faith” is what moves God to do what we want – maybe even something great – because we believe He can.

Again, we sang a song earlier that’s a perfect example of this.

I’ve seen You move the mountains (which we’d have to say is something great).

And I believe I’ll see You do it again

You made a way where there was no way

And I believe I’ll see You do it again

This is my confidence: you've never failed me yet

From a biblical perspective, this is a legit understanding of faith.

- It's all over the Old Testament book of Psalms.
- The Apostle Paul wrote about it.
- Jesus literally talked about faith using this metaphor.

"If you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move."

Matthew 21:21 (NIV)

So, please don't hear what I'm not saying. I'm not saying that these two ways of thinking about "faith" are bad or wrong.

What I *am* saying is that if these are your only definitions of faith, you're missing out because you're overlooking the kind of faith that is the most predominant from beginning to end, from Old Testament to New, from Moses to Jesus.

This kind of faith, instead of moving *God* to do what *we* want ...

3. ... moves *us* to do what *God* wants – maybe even something great – because we believe He is leading us and will empower us.

That's a very different perspective, isn't it?

In fact, because it's *so* different, can we all read that together out loud?

Faith is what moves us to do what God wants – maybe even something great – because we believe He is leading us and will empower us.

To put it in terms of the songs we've sung today

...

- Sometimes God *moves* the mountain. And sometimes God says *to climb* the mountain.
- Sometimes God acts for *us*, sometimes God enables *us* to act for Him.

And that's when faith becomes a verb.

And, again, this is by far the most predominant form of faith throughout the entire Bible.

In fact, it's not too much to say that *without* this form of faith, the other two really don't matter.

And that's not just my opinion.

That's what James, the brother of Jesus, once wrote:

What good is it, dear brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but don't show it by your actions?

And, if you read the whole passage, his answer is “not much.” Literally “no good whatsoever.”

κ And here's why:

You say you have faith, for you believe that there is one God. Good for you! Even the demons believe this, and they tremble in terror. James 2:14,19 (NLT)

See ...

- Demons have a correct theology.
- And demons believe in the power of God.
- But they have no interest in doing what God wants ...

... which is why their “faith” (if you can call it that) does them no good.

Anyway ... my point is that, biblically, this type of “faith” (faith as a verb) is the most predominant and the most important and yet, in real life, it’s the most lacking.

... which is why, if you’re a Christian, ...

- As much as I hope you’re encouraged when you sing about what we believe.
- As much as I hope you’re encouraged to trust in God’s goodness when you’re facing a mountain in your life.

... what I *really* want for you – and for me – is to experience God’s power when you step out in faith and do whatever it is He might be leading you to do.

I want you to experience “faith” as a verb. And that’s why we’re doing this series.

Of course, if you're not a Christian, that may not be possible. I'm not sure how you'll be able to incorporate this into your life without actually *becoming* a Christian.

But, at the very least, if you're considering the possibility of believing in and following Jesus, what we're going to talk about will give you a fuller understanding of what "faith" – Christian faith – is all about.

Now, with all that said, let me give you a very brief overview of where we're going in this series.

Each week, we're going to look at a practical aspect of what it means in everyday life when faith is a verb.

Faith as a verb means ...

- Choosing crazy ... going where God leads

even when it doesn't make sense.

We're going to talk about that today.

- Giving up ... doing what God asks even when it requires sacrifice.

That's next Sunday.

- Muddling through ... when you've said yes but it's harder than you thought and now you wonder if it's really worth it.
- Leaving a legacy ... when you think you're finished and there's no more use for you.
- Doing the right thing ... even when everyone else isn't.

That's what "faith as a verb" looks like in everyday life for someone who is a Christian.

It's also the kind of faith we will need *collectively as a church* if we merge with Hope Church KC ...

... which, as you know if you've been here and paying attention for the past month or so, is the decision our leaders (and their leaders) are facing; a decision we're going to make in a couple of weeks.

That's why I said at the beginning that this is such an incredibly important moment in the life of our church. If we do this thing, it will dramatically impact our immediate and long-term future.

In fact, as I have *personally* thought through and prayed about this possibility – because it's going to affect *my* immediate and long-term future dramatically – all five of those issues have come up.

- Choosing crazy

- Giving up
- Muddling through
- Leaving a legacy
- Doing the right thing

If we merge, I'm going to need the kind of faith that does all of those things.

And so will you if this is your church ...

... which is why, as we go through this series, some of what I'm going to say will speak to that issue.

Now, if you're new to us and you want to know more about this "merger thing," you can go to our website which is northheartland.org and click the "merger" banner at the top.

And that will take you to a page where there is lots of info, including a bunch of questions and answers that came from the seven townhall

meetings we had.

A Crazy Messenger

So, let's get into it.

And to help illustrate how this kind of faith works, today (and over the next several weeks) we're going to look at the story of one of my favorite biblical characters, John the Baptist or more accurately "John the Baptizer."

John got that name because, right before Jesus came onto the scene, he literally baptized hundreds if not thousands of people in first century Palestine.

Luke, a first century physician and researcher who spent a lot of time and effort documenting the ministry of Jesus ...

... tells us that ...

It was now the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius, the Roman emperor. Pontius Pilate was governor over Judea; Herod Antipas was ruler[a] over Galilee; his brother Philip was ruler over Iturea and Traconitis; Lysanias was ruler over Abilene. Annas and Caiaphas were the high priests.

... all of which sounds like a bunch of useless mumbo jumbo to us but is actually very important because it locates the story of John in a real time and a real place.

It's Luke's way of saying, "this isn't a fairytale. This isn't once upon a time."

In the fifteenth year of Tiberius Caesar ...

... a message from God came to John son of Zechariah, who was living in the wilderness. Then John went from place to place on both sides of the Jordan River,

preaching that people should be baptized to show that they had repented of their sins and turned to God to be forgiven. Luke 3:1-3 (NLT)

Matthew, who was one of Jesus' first followers, gives us a little bit more detail in his version of the story.

He writes:

In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near."

... which is almost word for word the primary message that Jesus would soon be preaching.

This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah: "A voice of one calling in the wilderness, Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for

him.” Matthew 3:1-3 (NIV)

In other words, Matthew is saying, John (and what he was doing) was the fulfillment of an ancient prophecy which foretold that before the Messiah came, there would be someone who would get people ready for his arrival.

And everyone was fired up about that and about John.

As Luke puts it ...

Everyone was expecting the Messiah to come soon, and they were eager to know whether John might be the Messiah.

Luke 3:15 (NLT)

... which is why so many of them – men and women from all walks of life – made the difficult journey out to the desert (in some cases as much as 20 miles on foot) to see what was going on.

- The religious leaders went.
- Tax collectors and other sinners went.
- Regular people like you and me went.
- Even Roman soldiers went.

Of course, John was *not* the Messiah and he made that very clear.

“I’m not worthy even to untie his sandals,” he told them. “I’m just the messenger.”

And what a messenger he was!

Matthew writes that ...

John’s clothes were made of camel’s hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey.

Matthew 3:4 (NIV)

John was a sight to behold. He was dressed like a crazy man, and he lived like a crazy man.

Not only that ... John talked like a crazy man, saying things to certain people that you just don't say to those certain people.

Again, Matthew tells us that ...

When he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?"

Matthew 3:7 (NIV)

Can you imagine if I started the message like *that* this morning?

Instead of "thanks for being here" it was "you bunch of snakes, you better look out. God is not happy with you."

That's what John did. And it was highly offensive.

But John didn't seem to care.

In fact, to make sure we know that this wasn't just a bad day in John's career ...

Luke writes ...

John used many such warnings as he announced the Good News to the people.

Luke 3:18 (NLT)

This was his typical approach!

Can you imagine if he was announcing *bad news*?

Now, this is just the beginning of John's story. There's a lot more to it, including ...

- The interaction he has with Jesus

- The trouble he runs into with Herod Antipas who, as we read, was ruler over Galilee
- And then, the way John eventually dies

And we'll get to all of that in the coming weeks, but I want you to think about something.

Whenever we read about people like John, we tend to envision them as super-spiritual ...

- As if they have it all figured out.
- As if they don't ever have to wrestle with questions and struggles like we do.
- As if they just do whatever they do without thinking about it.

So, here's a question I think about whenever I

think about John, especially the beginning of his story.

And I want you to think about it, too.

How did John get to the point where he accepted that it would be normal for him to dress crazy, eat crazy, talk crazy, and do crazy things?

When John was eight years old or 12 years old or even 16 years old, did he ever envision himself as a grown man living in the wilderness, dressed in camel's hair, eating locusts and honey for his survival?

Did he ever imagine himself calling the religious leaders a "brood of vipers" while standing in the Jordan River again and again, dunking thousands of people under the water?

I'm enough of a realist – a skeptic, even – that I don't think that "just happened."

Of course, if you know your Bible, you know that John's parents had been told by an angel before his birth that he was going to be the forerunner to the Messiah.

And I would expect that, at some point, they told him that. "Son, God has revealed to us that you are going to be that voice crying in the wilderness, 'prepare the way of the Lord.'"ⁱ

But just because they told him doesn't mean he automatically bought in.

I don't think when John turned 18 (or whatever age), he said, "Well, I guess it's time. I'll move on out to the desert tomorrow."

I think there had to be a moment (or many moments) where he had thoughts of "you know, maybe I *should* go and do that; after all, God *did* tell my parents."

But then I think he thought, "that *can't* be what

I'm supposed to do. That doesn't make any sense at all!"

Because John was a person like you and me, I think there had to be moments of doubt and questioning.

And then I think, at some point, John believed that *he himself* had heard from God.

"A message from God came to John" is how Luke phrased it.

And then John *chose crazy*.

"It doesn't make sense to me. I can't see how this is going to work or where it's going to lead."

"But I'm doing it anyway."

And in that moment – and again and again, going forward (as we'll see in coming weeks) ...

- “Faith” for John became more than a set of beliefs he had learned in Sabbath School.
- “Faith” for John became more than a way to move God to do what *he* wanted.
- “Faith” moved *John* to do what *God* wanted – something great, something unimaginable – because he believed God was leading him and would empower him.

How It Works

Of course, that’s how it worked for a lot of people we read about in the Bible.

“Noah, I want you to build an ark.”

“Ok, Lord, what’s an ark? And why?”

“Well, a couple decades from now, it’s gonna rain for 40 days and 40 nights and there’s going

to be a big flood. And you're going to need a huge boat so I can save you and my creation from death."

So, even though it was crazy, in faith, Noah started building.

"Hey, Abram, I know you love where you live and that you're comfortable and all that, but I want you to cash out. I want you to sell the farm and move."

"Ok, Lord, where do you want me to go?"

"Well, I'm not going to tell you until you get there. You just have to trust me. Just load everything up and start walking."

"Can I ask why?"

"Well, I need you to be in a certain place so that when I make you the father of a great nation, the whole world will be blessed by your offspring."

“Huh. Now, you do know that me and the wife are up there in age, and we’ve not been able to have kids, right?”

“Yep, I know. I’m going to take care of that at the appropriate time. Now, move on out.”

So, even though it was crazy, in faith, that’s what Abram and his wife, Sarai, did.

God changed their name to Abraham and Sarah and they did have kids ... who had kids who had kids who had kids ...

- One of whom eventually had a daughter named Mary ...
- Who gave birth to a son named Jesus ...
- Through whom the whole world has been and will be blessed.

“Hey Jesus! Is that really you walking on the water?”

“Yeah, Pete, it’s me.”

“Wow! I’d really like to give that a try!”

“Well, Pete, if you want to walk on water, you gotta get out of the boat.”

So, even though it was crazy, in faith, that’s what Peter did. He got out of the boat, and he walked on the water.

Now, as I said earlier, whenever we read about people like this, we tend to envision them as super-spiritual ...

- As if they had it all figured out.
- As if they never had to wrestle with questions and struggles like we do.

- As if they just did whatever they did without thinking about it.

But they didn't because ...

- They were real people just like you and me
...
- Who believed in God just like you and me
...
- Who God asked to “choose crazy” just like he does you and me if we're Christians.

If you're a follower of Jesus, you should not be surprised if and when God asks you to “choose crazy” ...

... to do something *He* wants – maybe even something great, something unimaginable – because He will lead you and empower you, just like He did them.

Has that ever happened to you?

It has to me. A lot.

Several weeks ago, as I was thinking about this series – and also about the potential merger ...

I made a list of all the times in my 64 years that I did something crazy because I thought God was leading me and would empower me.

I'm going to share part of my list with you but I'm hesitant because I don't want you to think I'm somebody special. I'm not. I'm just a guy and a pretty messed up one at that who happens to believe in Jesus.

Now, if you're a Christian, it might be worth you doing what I did: take some time and think back over your life and ask ...

Has my "faith" ever moved *me* to do what *God* wanted – maybe even something great

or unimaginable – because I believed He was leading me and would empower me?

And you might have a long list or you might have a short list.

And if you have a short list (or no list), it might be because you don't have faith. Maybe you've never said "yes" to God. Maybe you've never expressed faith in Jesus.

I believe in God the Father.

I believe in Jesus Christ.

I believe in the Holy Spirit.

Maybe you need to start there.

But if you have done that – if you do have faith in Jesus as your savior, that his death and resurrection are what saves you from sin ...

It could be that you just don't recognize a message from God.

Remember, that's how John the Baptizer got started. Luke said it was a message from God that came to him.

Now, we don't know if that was an audible voice – “John, get thee a cloak made of camel's hair. Eat locusts” – or if it was just an impression. Apparently, John never told anyone.

But in my experience and in the experience of many others I know, God's messages don't typically come audibly.

Instead, they come through impressions and circumstances when certain very important conditions are met.

And I cannot overemphasize that. You cannot trust any impression or set of circumstances unless these things are in place first.

So, what are the conditions?

Trust in the Lord with all your heart. Lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him and he will direct your paths. Proverbs 3:5-6 (NIV)

Your attitude has to be ...

- “Lord, I 100% believe that you are for me and with me.” That’s trusting with all your heart.
- “And I know that you know more than me. Your ways are higher than mine.” That’s “leaning not” on your own understanding.
- “And because you’re so much wiser than I am, I want your will not mine in everything I do.” That’s acknowledging him in all your ways.

And when that is your attitude and you find

yourself facing a situation that seems crazy, where you think “that *can't* be what I'm supposed to do. That doesn't make any sense at all!”

You should do it.

You should step out in faith – go into the wilderness, build an ark, get out of the boat – whatever it is because God is and has been directing your path.

The day we signed the crazy contract on our crazy house ... as we were walking into the office to meet with the builder, my phone dings.

It's my Bible app with the verse of the day. Guess which verse it was? That verse.

And I knew for certain that God was directing our path.

So, we chose crazy.

Conclusion

So, if you're a Christian, don't be surprised if and when God asks you to choose crazy with the promise that he will lead you and empower you.

- Because faith is more than just what we believe.
- And faith is more than moving God to do what we want.
- It's being moved to do what God wants.

So, today, do you sense God asking you to choose crazy in some part of your life?

If so ...

- Are you trusting in Him?

- Leaning on his understanding and not your own?
- Wanting his will and not your own?

Let's pray.

Endnotes

¹ Luke 1:76-78