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Unity Church—Unitarian

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Faith

Each month worship, religious education, community outreach ministry, covenant groups and Wellspring Wednesday programs offer opportunities to contemplate, consider, contend with and discuss an intergenerational curriculum based on monthly themes. Our hope is that this approach will bind us more closely together and inform our lives in effective and positive ways. September's theme is... Faith

In the early teachings of many world religions, the word *faith* appears not as a noun but as a verb. It is a way that we live, a leap that we take, a loyalty that we grow into over time. In the original Buddhist texts, the Pali word for faith meant literally "to place the heart upon."

Our own English word *faith* derives from the Latin word *fides*, meaning fidelity or loyalty, implying a relationship on which we can rely. When we have faith, we are talking about where and on whom we place our deepest trust. We are talking about a commitment we make with our hearts and confirm with our lives.

Of course, like many words in our religious vocabularies, *faith* has sometimes been hijacked and conscripted into service as a judgment, a tool for sorting the faithful from the faithless. As if a line could be drawn between the two, and as if those on the wrong side of the line could be marked with a giant H for their heresy.

Our Unitarian forebears knew better. As Francis David and others reminded us, faith rises from within. It can neither be forced nor judged from the outside, whether by church doctrine or laws of the land. It is a conviction born in the search for truth and the personal discovery of trust and surrender. Or, as the Buddhist writer Sharon Salzberg puts it, faith is "an inner quality that unfolds as we learn to trust our own deepest experience."

What do you trust most deeply – in your life, in the unfolding of history, and in the universe at large? What do you know to be reliable? Is it science

or perhaps society, the common good or the human conscience? Do you have faith in Love or Life itself, in Nature or in God or in the holy ground of being? Do you sometimes say, *I must see it to believe it*, or do you find yourself depending on different ways of seeing? For many of us, navigating life's challenges and changing currents requires that we come to trust some combination of the above. "Faithful living" can be a matter of learning how and when to rely on each of the loyalties engraved within our hearts.

My friend Kay tells about one such lesson in her youth. Having lost the vision in one eye as an infant, she learned at the age of 10 that she would soon lose her sight in the other eye as well. It was a frightening truth delivered by her doctors on a September day, the kind that could steal your inner balance at any age and leave you longing for solid ground. Not two hours later, though, Kay recalls how her faith was restored. As she sat at the kitchen table, still reeling from this news, her father handed her a basket of ripe pears. *Close your eyes*, he told her gently, *and pick the best one*. Reaching into the basket, eyes closed, she carefully chose a pear and heard her father's immediate delight. *That's right*, he exclaimed. *You're going to be all right*.

"Faith is the evidence of things unseen," the Christian scriptures tell us. It is the mountain-moving potential buried within the mustard seed. It is the conviction that the long arc of the universe bends toward justice, even if our nearsightedness sometimes prevents us from spotting it. "Faith is not," author Joanna Russ points out, "something that

turns out to be right or wrong, like a gambler's bet: it's an act, an intention . . ." It is a quality of being that calls us to be loyal to our heart's inner leaning, even and especially when facing the unknown.

So close your eyes and consider: On what do you place your heart? To what and to whom are you called to be faithful? What are the convictions rising from within you, and what would it mean to live in loyalty to them?

~ Karen Hering
Consulting Literary Minister

Worship Theme Resources

BOOKS

Faith: Trusting Your Own Deepest Experience, by Sharon Salzberg (Riverhead, 2002)

Faith and Belief, by Wilfred Cantwell Smith (Princeton Press, 1987)

A Chosen Faith, by John A. Buehrens and Forrest Church (Beacon, 1998)

The Sacred Depths of Nature, by Ursula Goodenough (Oxford, 1998)

The Courage to Be, by Paul Tillich (Yale, 1952; 2nd edition, 2000)

2010-11 THEOLOGICAL THEMES

September: Faith

October: Longing

November: Covenant

December: Wonder

January: Justice

February: Surrender

March: Evil

April: Freedom

May: Peace

June: Wisdom