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A Jewish lawyer was troubled by the way his son turned out, and went to see his Rabbi about it. "I brought him up in the faith, gave him a very expensive bar mitzvah, cost me a fortune to educate him. Then he tells me last week he has decided to be a Christian. Rabbi... where did I go wrong? "Funny you should come to me," said the Rabbi. "Like you, I, too, brought my boy up in the faith, put him through University, cost me a fortune, then one day he comes and tells me he has decided to become a Christian. "What did you do?" asked the lawyer. "I turned to God for the answer," replied the rabbi. "And what did he say? "He said, "Funny you should come to me..."

It is true that there is fairly widespread evidence of a crisis in the life of faith of many Christians. It can be sparked off by different things, like the past cruelties within institutions and society generally, a disastrous love-relationship, family tensions, the tragic injury or death of friends, and terrorism.

Sometimes, too, religious feeling can wither as financial prosperity grows, and our need for God is stifled by feelings of self-sufficiency. Or new friendships that we make with nice people who hold no religious beliefs can make us feel that God really does not matter after all.

Sam Harris writes in his book

The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason

"The men who committed the atrocities of September 11 2001, were certainly not 'cowards,' as they were repeatedly described in the Western media, nor were they lunatics in any ordinary sense. They were men of faith—perfect faith, as it turns out—and this, it must finally be acknowledged, is a terrible thing to be."

"The only angels we need invoke are those of our better nature: reason, honesty, and love. The only demons we must fear are those that lurk inside every human mind: ignorance, hatred, greed, and faith, which is surely the devil's masterpiece."

It is tempting to write God out of our picture altogether

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But then - we are often assured growing up that going through a questioning phase does not mean we have lost the faith. Questioning of faith can also be a growth point. A faith which is challenged can emerge as fuller and more genuine. It can mark the change from the comfort of childhood certainties to new horizons, when the young adult is searching for a deeper experience. We grow, as St Paul would have it: *“from faith, through faith, to faith, sustained always by hope”*

Faith is both an intellectual attitude professing what we judge to be true; and a response to our feelings; but these are a gift of the Spirit which moves us to give ourselves over to One greater than ourselves. If we hand ourselves over to this sense of God and let go of the illusion of being only for ourselves, it can bring us inner, spiritual growth.

C.S. Lewis (one of the greatest defenders of the faith of the twentieth century) left his childhood Christian faith to spend years as a determined atheist. But, after years of struggle he finally admitted that God existed, and knelt in prayer to become what he described later as *“the most dejected and reluctant convert in all England.”*

Lewis’s long journey away from, and back to, faith began with his mother’s death from cancer when he was a boy. Disillusioned that God had not healed his mother, Lewis set out on a path toward full-bodied rationalism and atheism.

The road back to faith was cluttered with obstacles Lewis once thought impossible to overcome. His conversion to a robust Christianity required years of intellectual struggle and came only after being convinced that faith was reasonable.

Lewis spoke and wrote often of “joy,” a deep longing of the human heart this world cannot satisfy, and presented it as evidence for God.

“Joy” was a recurring experience for Lewis as a child and adolescent and came to him through nature, literature or music. Lewis argued this longing is common to all mankind. He found the JOY spoken of by the prophets and the Psalmists *“The Joy of God is your strength”*

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The atheist Bertrand Russell wrote of the same yearning.

“The centre of me is always and eternally a terrible pain—a curious wild pain—a searching for something beyond what the world contains—something transfigured and infinite . . . I do not find it; I do not think it is to be found—but the love of it is my life”

But Lewis made a case for God by arguing that every natural, innate desire corresponds to some real object that can fulfil that desire: ***“If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world.”*** Here was the joy, and the hope which transformed Lewis’s pain! He belonged to another world!

Faith then, is a special form of knowing which touches an awareness deep within us, an awareness of God’s presence guiding and helping us. It is the experience described about Abraham, Jesus and other great figures in the Bible.

Faith is an on-going process, growing as we grow, changing as we change, maturing and we mature. Our childhood faith cannot sustain us in adulthood, though it can develop into one that stays with us through life, as we struggle to find that question - **the question to which our faith is the answer.** Who am I, where do I belong, what am I doing here?

We are a people of the question, with the ability and space to question, to doubt, to wrestle and rest in the tensions. But as Christians, we are also the faith descendants of people of the question.

Today’s reading from the letter to the Hebrews refers to the ancient Israelites wandering in the desert: **“They confessed that they were strangers and foreigners on the earth, for people who speak in this way make it clear that they are seeking a homeland.”** Asking the question, if you like, “where do I belong?”.

Like our faith ancestors, our identity is stated as a question, a hope, an unfulfilled and always fulfilling prophecy: **Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again.** We, by our identity as Christians, choose to

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live in a place of hope. We are always searching, travelling, and restless? To be hopeful and to be Christian is akin to and descended from a long line of peregrinating pilgrims, always on the move, going somewhere.

Like the pilgrims in the Bible whose home was not known to them. And yet, they resided spiritually in the home that had been promised to them, to their ancestors by their God. A home hoped for is still a home? Can we claim a home of faith and yet be wanderers in a foreign land?

We live in a world of ever-increasing homelessness and placelessness. Look around at the rates of homelessness, unemployment, and underemployment. Also consider the larger displacement of people due to climate change, while millions flee war and terror of one kind or another?

What is the Christian call in a world of such placelessness? Is it to erect fences, fortify borders, and protect our own sense of place, As Christians we too are passing through living the lives of placelessness, caring for place while exerting no ownership. We occupy spaces, places, that are not our own. Yet we erect fences and defend our borders, unable to welcome the Master to our space, in whatever form he or she takes.

Frederick Buechner says of such mystery *“How can we describe such things other than to say that they are ultimately indescribable? You can know them only by experiencing them for yourself.”*

Maybe we need to live the experience of belonging somewhere else!

As Henri Nouwen has it:

“**Our** life is full of brokenness...bitter relationships, broken promises, broken expectations. How can we live with that brokenness without becoming bitter and resentful except by returning again and again to God's faithful presence in our lives?”

And elsewhere he says:

“**God** is faithful to God's promises. Before you die, you will find acceptance and the love you crave. It will not come in the way you expect.

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It will not follow your needs and wishes. But it will fill your heart and satisfy your deepest desire. There is nothing to hold on but this promise. Cling to the naked promise in faith. Your faith will heal you.”

Our God is a God who is always calling us into new life, into the future. Faith is future-oriented, trusting that God will keep God’s promises. In a nutshell, faith and hope are one, and the life of faith is pilgrimage, a journey. Calling us home! **“It is the Father’s good pleasure to give you the Kingdom”**

Abraham sets off for the place God has promised, not knowing where it might be. Even when he gets there, the place is not his to claim. Indeed, he and his children and his children’s children sojourn as foreigners in the land of promise. Abraham anticipated a city with sure foundations even though he spent his life living in a tent, a city with a river flowing through it, even though he lived in a desert.

The God who calls us into new life gives us a vision of the homeland we seek. Such vision enabled Abraham to remain faithful to the elusive, unseen God who called him. Such vision enabled him to live as a resident alien in the new land, and to see with fresh eyes the goals, values, and relationships of the society encountered in the new land. The faith of Abraham and Sarah was more than right thinking; it also involved right acting. It involved not just their minds, but their whole beings.

“Remember that faith is more of a process than a possession, on-again-off-again than once and for all. Faith is not being sure where you’re going, but going anyway. A journey without maps.” Frederick Buechner

This is the call of the hope in which we reside – forever placeless and yet always home.

“It is the Father’s good pleasure to give you the Kingdom”

As it says in today’s reading from Hebrews: **“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”**