

Our GPS's talk to us - I love all the language options. It took me a while to trust it - especially when I listened to it and it took me through some isolated country roads and fairly interesting city streets late at night. Then when I decide to go against its advice and frustrate it's direction, it immediately tells me that it is re-calculating. The way I drive, I hear the announcement "re-calculating" quite often.

Situations we find ourselves in often turn us around. We need to switch back, and set out in a different direction. The destination we thought was in sight just down the road, gets lost somehow and we aren't sure anymore. We will be looking at our life coordinates in the light of life conditions that cause us to re-calculate our position and direction over the next 4 weeks.

*So now - sit back in the pew - relax - close your eyes - and be centered in this time and space. Be aware of your current coordinates. And breathe in the presence and liveliness of the Spirit.*

A British philosopher, Onora O'Neill, in a series of lectures said that our culture is suffering from a crisis of trust. However we don't need a philosopher to tell us that we have become quite cynical in many of our attitudes. We approach people in public life with a level of suspicion. We no longer feel that the big institutions in our society care about public trust. We are unhappy and mistrustful about our government. And we sense that we are caught up in international and economic patterns we can't control and which don't work for us. Certainly deep seeded doubt and mistrust about where we are as a society and that our economic system is not working for many people are driving the Wall Street sit-in. The market's up and down and the current Greek bail out contributes to our overall despondency. Some are calling for relationship building and connecting people of diverse points of view but these calls are still in the infant stage. We have learned to doubt and to be suspicious about our institutions and leaders.

There is also a crisis of faith. We have seen a steady stream of the failings of religious leaders plastered across the front page and across web postings the last few years. More of our neighbors than ever before are no longer going to church - and don't see the need for church. Some feel that church is irrelevant to their questions of faith. People want to know what difference going to church makes. Does it address that cries of my heart for meaning and purpose? Can it

help me live my faith in my everyday life? Can I trust it? It is up to us to respond in credible ways to these questions.

We have learned to doubt and be surprised if something good happens to us. We don't expect it! Our doubt comes from believing that we have little control over what is going on around us. Other people have agendas that don't include us. It is a question of trust. Trusting that Jesus is working for us and not around us or apart from us. That what we hear from Jesus and the Bible is true and can be trusted to be operative in the world.

How does belief in God form and find its start? First from a sense that we can believe in and trust certain people. We have confidence in the way they live, the way they live is the way we want to live, perhaps can imagine ourselves living in our better moments. Faith begins with the knowledge that there are trustworthy lives to be seen - in the people around us. We move through the questions and doubts by hearing and learning from each other. People of faith have quite an impact on the people around them. Doubt is taken up when we come into contact with people whose lives have been examples and that despite whatever hardships they have faced, their faith has led them through. I would love for everyone at Towson to be connected with some people who share faith - and doubt with each other. I have been a part of groups like that in my life and they are great gifts.

Etty Hillesum was one of these people. She was a young Jewish woman in her 20's when Hitler took over her country, the Netherlands. Hers was a witness of great faith in the face of huge doubt. Her diaries from 1941 - 1943 show how, during this terrible period in the history of her country, she found the courage to believe. Imprisoned in a transit camp before being shipped to Auschwitz where she was to die, she wrote "there must be someone to live through it all and bear witness to the fact that God lived, even in these times. And why should I not be that witness?" In a letter to a friend, she described her life as having become "an uninterrupted dialogue with YOU, O God" and her understanding of her role in the camp as "not simply to proclaim YOU, God, but to commend YOU you to the heart of others. One must also clear the path toward You in them."

It is plain that she saw her belief as a matter of deciding to occupy a certain place in the world a place where others could somehow connect with God through her - not because she was any better than anyone else but simply because she had agreed to take responsibility for God's believability.

When God is an object of belief or doubt, then our concentration is on what we think about God - our ideas about God. We were probably taught that faith had to do with giving assent to certain ideas about God. We were trained to stay in our head about God. Doubt comes because, behind our expressed faith, is a belief that if anything is going to happen, we are going to have to do it. We don't trust anything beyond our own reach. We need to make everything happen in the world. Someone has called this "functional atheism". We say we believe but our guts say otherwise. This is Thomas saying - show me your hands and feet?

When God moves from the object to the subject of belief, something happens. What I mean is that we go from a set of beliefs about God to trusting in the reality and presence of God. Faith goes from being an idea to an experience. There is a difference between doubting what we believe about God and doubting God. In the first instance, we may conclude that there is always more to learn. That our view of God is always smaller than God is. This is Thomas saying - My Lord and my God.

We can't make ourselves trust. Try as we might, we cannot force it. IN fact the more we try deny our doubt, the more we doubt. What we can do is pay attention to God's faithfulness. We can remember - re-member - re-connect to what God has done and so make it real again. It is what happens over and over again in the Psalms. But thou, O Lord, are a shield for me. My glory and the lifter of my head. I cry unto the Lord with my need - and he heard me out of his holy hill. For the Lord sustains -- He sustains me!

In the book *Tuesdays with Morrie* - a best seller from a few years ago, Mitch Albom wrote of his love for his mentor, Morrie Schwartz a Brandeis sociology professor, who was dying of Lou Gehrig's disease. Mitch used to visit Morrie every Tuesday to spend the day with his beloved old professor. One day, Mitch asked Morrie if he ever felt sorry for himself.

*Sometimes in the mornings, he said, that;s when I mourn. I feel around my body, I move my fingers and my hands - whatever I can still move - and I mourn what I have lost. I mourn the slow insidious way in which I'm dying. But then I stop mourning.*

*Just like that?*

*I give myself a good cry if I need it. But then I concentrate on all the good things still in my life On the people who are coming to see me. On the stories I'm going to hear. On you -- if it's Tuesday. Because we're Tuesday people.*

*Tuesday people.*

*Mitch - I don't allow myself any more self-pity than that. A little each morning, a few tears, and that's all.*

So what is the role of doubt? It is very positive, actually. Doubt keeps us searching and prevents us from thinking we have it all figured out. For God is beyond our figuring out. Does doubt lead us to reject? We disparage doubt because we see it as leading to a state of undecidability. The reality is that doubt is to be celebrated as a vital part of faith. It is the place out of which real decisions can be made. When two people get married, they are not promising themselves to each other around a set of beliefs about who they are and what they think about marriage and each other. Rather they are promising that they will work together to make sure whatever it is that they see - the potential in front of them - will happen. When we say we will follow Christ no matter what the uncertainty or doubt that comes up - then real faith is born. Love acts not because of a static set of beliefs but because it is the nature of love to act. May your doubt be the impetus for a deeper and fulfilling faith.