

## New Dimensions of Faith

John's stories about Jesus are always full of discoveries.

In the story of Jesus at the wedding in Cana ( John 2:1-11) faith is expressed in surprising ways.

Have you ever thought about the effect of this miracle of turning water into wine on the disciples? Verse 11 says, "He thus revealed his glory, and the disciples put their faith in him." What? Did they not already have faith in him? They had faith enough to leave their usual occupations and follow him. We need to understand the nature of faith to see what is happening here.

Faith is not just a commodity that we have more or less of. Faith is expressed in an activity. It does things. Faith 'rests' in the perfectly complete work of the Cross – which brings peace of heart and a certainty of acceptance.

Faith 'trusts' the promptings of the Spirit and does what is laid on our heart to do.

Faith 'takes hold' of the promises of God and prays until they are made real in our life.

Faith 'responds' with obedience to another revelation of who God is or what he can do.

In that miracle, the disciples had seen more of who Jesus is, and they again had to 'put their faith in him' – not just as a Rabbi to follow, but as one sent by God – able to reveal the glory of the Creator of life.

Faith is always IN something or someone, FOR something.

We have faith in our car (mostly!) that it will come alive when we turn the key and will take us where we need to go.

We have faith that when we swipe our card and put in our pin, our money will be released to us.

As the Lord shows us more of himself, and more of what he is able to do, we are challenged to step into that by faith.

This was the continuing experience of the disciples. It is also ours. Sometimes they balked at what he was saying or doing. So do we. We can be slow to respond with faith to something new he is showing us, or asking of us.

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- When he asked them to feed the hungry crowd and they had no faith for a miracle.
  - When he said he was the Living Bread they had to eat and many turned away.
  - When he had fed the 5,000 – but the disciples then talked about forgetting to bring the bread.
  - When he told them he was going to die and Peter rebuked him.
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The English Bible teacher David Pawson once asked this profound question, "When did you last believe in Jesus?"

I think he meant, 'When did you last have to step out in faith, trusting what Jesus has asked you to do?'

The writer of Hebrews in Ch.4:2 says of the Israelites, "the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith." Many, in Jesus' day heard him but did not combine hearing with faith – that is, with any words or actions that showed they trusted or obeyed what he said. It is true for us too. We can hear and not combine it with faith. When we listen to the Lord, our prayer always needs to be 'How can I express faith in what you are saying to me Lord?'

The Lord wants to regularly 'reveal his glory' to us in new ways – so we may put our faith in him and walk in the power or truth he is revealing. It is an interesting exercise to trace our 'faith progression'. Over the years since you first believed, what new areas of faith have you been invited to walk in? Have you trusted the Shepherd to guide you? Have you trusted his wisdom to rise into your mind in difficult conversations? Have you trusted him to walk with you through a dark valley?

Have you had to have confidence that he will indeed 'supply all your needs through his riches in Christ Jesus?' Have you taken on a role you felt too big for you, and had to 'walk by faith' into it?

In new seasons of life we will be asked for new expressions of faith. We cannot walk today in the faith of yesterday. We can stand on it, but we cannot move on in it. Jesus "revealed his glory... and they put their faith in him." So must we.

Back to the wedding scene. Something else is happening, to Mary, the mother of Jesus, in this story. It is Mary's faith that provokes this miracle!

Imagine her life up to now... She had those wonderful promises of Jesus as the Saviour of the world. She has been watching his maturing into adulthood, waiting and wondering. Now he has gathered disciples. WHEN is he going to reveal himself as the Messiah, as the Saviour? She must've been on edge of her seat with expectation.

Imagine the scene with me. Was Mary part of the catering team? Was this a wedding in a friend's family? She noticed that the wine had run out. Did she come to Jesus with some servants in tow? What was she expecting Jesus to do? Was she really expecting a miracle? Had the Father prompted her?

Notice the conversation – I feel it had some long pauses in it. Things are going on underneath. "They have no more wine."

Jesus is puzzled. "Dear woman (madam/lady), why do you involve me? My time has not yet come." Ah... Jesus knew she was asking for some divine intervention. But he had no sense from the Father that he should be doing anything about it. Does he turn away? Does she walk away? What is her expression? She feels sure he will do something. Yet he said no – wrong time. Do they stand there looking at each other.... "No..." from Jesus. "Yes..." says Mary's faith. Then she says to the servants – "Do whatever he tells you." How audacious! But this is the key. This is the statement of faith that unlocks the miracle.

It is as if at that point the Father says to Jesus... 'Change of plan, Son... go ahead. Great faith is operating here!' Jesus shifts gear and the miracle happens. Most of the miracles of Jesus are drawn out by the faith of someone involved. Not all, but most. This is the partnership we are called to – co-labouring with Jesus.

Something in Mary's spirit said 'He has the answer!' – even in such a practical matter. And she would not take 'no' for an answer.

Jesus seemed to respond to bold faith like this. In another story a Greek woman wanted her daughter released from demons.

Jesus tested her and she responded boldly about 'eating the crumbs from under the table'. (Mark 7:24) Jesus is delighted at her response.

Both women were reaching out for what God had planned for later – and they said, "Do it now!" God views timing differently to us. He is actually more concerned about the right conditions for things to happen, rather than the right time chronologically. The condition is great faith.

Both these women 'saw' what could be, what they longed for, through the insight of the Spirit. And in seeing, their faith enlarged so they could receive.

Someone has said, "If you can see it (in the Spirit) you can have it." This is the 'seeing' of faith. Faith enables unseen realities that have real substance (in heaven) to be seen and almost felt in this realm. And

we can take hold of them and pull them into our earthly realm. This is the way we help to fulfill Jesus' words, "Your Kingdom come, your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven."

God has designed the universe to run by faith. Jesus already had the wine. Mary could see and taste that before it became a reality.

Faith sees into the future, into the eternal, and takes hold of these realities and pulls them into the present.

The way this works for us is that we ask the Lord to open our eyes to the spiritual realities that he intends to bring to birth, and we take hold of them by faith and declare them, for as long as it takes... and bring them into NOW. This is the partnership of faith we are called into for the sake of a world in need.

What if we could see what God has for those loved ones we care about? Or those neighbours we are praying for? Can we see it? Can we see them redeemed and transformed by his love? Can we take hold of it? What difference would this make to our praying? More listening? More seeking to see? Less of our pain and concerns, and more of an enlarged, energised and excited faith?

A wonderful woman of faith in the last century called Agnes Sandford had a prayer band of faith-filled women and she asked them to come to church early, and instead of chatting, to sit and 'see' with the eyes of faith Jesus himself meeting with people as they came in. They were to simply invite Jesus to heal their hurts, to calm their fears, to grant wisdom, to heal their bodies, to speak life. She said that in 18 months many lives were transformed and they had a renewed congregation.

Faith sees, faith hears and obeys, faith rests, faith walks, faith comes boldly to the throne of grace, faith proclaims...

'When did you last have faith in Jesus?' And what for?

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