

Sermon – “Letting Go”  
Friday, December 24, 2021  
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Springfield, Illinois

The title of the meditation: Letting Go

Let us pray. Holy and loving God, as we reflect together on the meaning of your word made known to us in Jesus Christ and the gift of faith, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of each of our hearts be acceptable in your sight. Amen.

*There once was a man who liked to climb mountains. One Christmas Eve he had reached the top of a very tall mountain when he accidentally slipped and began falling down the side. Before he reached the cliff, he was fortunate enough to grab hold of an evergreen branch. Totally alone, hanging on for dear life, he cried out.*

*‘Can anyone up there help me?’*

To his surprise he received a response.

*‘This is the Lord,’ a voice replied.*

*‘Lord, I’m hanging from a branch about to fall off this cliff. Can you help me?’*

After a short silence that felt like a very long time, the Lord asked, *‘Do you believe?’*

*‘Yes, Lord, of course I believe.’*

*‘Then let go.’*

The man thought for a moment, and asked. (pause)

*‘Is anyone else up there?’*

This evening, I invite us to explore how “letting go” is an essential element of faith. The author of Hebrews, in chapter eleven, defines faith in this way: *Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.*

Sometimes we forget about the element of risk and mystery in faith. Faith consists of letting go of certainty and a willingness to participate whole-heartedly in the Magnum Mysterium, the great mystery. Faith consists of relinquishing preconceptions, prejudices, and apprehensions and embracing the unlikely and improbable without proof or guarantee. The deliberate act of letting go makes the leap of faith possible.

I remember as a young girl the leap of faith required to learn a back handspring. Those among us who are skilled gymnasts like Louisa Eldridge, one of our youth lectors this evening who recently qualified for nationals, understand the difficulty of learning to “let go” which is essential in this act of tumbling. First, the young gymnast learns the art of the back bend, reaching over backwards and touching the ground in a graceful arch. However, to progress to the back handspring, she must learn to lean back in a seated position “letting go” of her balance before arching her spine, leaping backward blindly, and then planting the hands. First one learns the form, then commits it to muscle memory, and finally takes the leap of faith necessary to complete the performance.

The Olympic story of Simone Biles, the greatest gymnast of all time, illustrates how essential “letting go” has become at the championship level. Simone, a four foot, eight-inch giant of the sport, contracted a case of the “twisties” during her preparation last summer. This well-known malady of championship gymnasts robs them of the muscle memory and positional sense needed to let go, to launch, to tumble and to land safely. With the twisties, Simone knew she could not let go and take the leap of faith off a four-inch beam or from an eight-foot high bar. She could, however, take the leap of faith necessary to abdicate her reign, to let go of another gold medal, and to empower her teammates’ rise to success.

Likewise, as believers we must let go and grasp the paradox of our faith in which a creator God joined us in our humanity, walked among us, and then suffered death so that we might live. Our leap requires a courageous reach yet promises the ultimate reward.

The late Rev. Dr. Fred Craddock, professor of preaching and New Testament at Emory University, described this quest when he wrote: *Faith hears, sees, and testifies, but faith is not arrogant or imperialistic as though its views were so obvious as to be embraced by all but the very obstinate. Faith involves a searching, a response to an offer, a hunger, a willingness to obey. Nothing about Jesus Christ is so publicly apparent as to rob faith of its risk, its choice, and its courage. Faith exists among alternatives.* (Preaching the New Common Lectionary, pg. 100)

On this Holy night, as we gather to affirm our faith which does exist among alternatives, may we embrace the Word made flesh, the babe in the manger, and the Prince of Peace, may we abdicate our anxieties, prejudices, and misinformation, and may we, as our Savior has taught us, let go and leap into a faith which uplifts, affirms, and advocates for all God’s children. Amen.