

"YOU HAVE MORE FAITH THAN YOU KNOW"

A Sermon By

Rev. Philip A. C. Clarke

Park Avenue United Methodist Church  
106 East 86th Street  
New York, New York 10028  
September 13, 1987

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Now, if those men could come back from Auschwitz and proclaim this in their medical journals, we can transfer that faith to our present situation which is not as severe. However, the challenge of the present for some gathered here this morning may be just as real, demanding and pressing as was that experience. Therefore, in a sense what they endured in their camps can be a model for us. In fact, Victor Frankl wrote a commentary on this miracle of Jesus. This miracle of our Lord and Viktor Frankl's experience in that Concentration Camp can help us with our endurance. He singled out three elements that we can hold up as a congregation and think about together.

#### ENVIRONMENT OF WARMTH

First, the tremendous environment of warmth. In the healing miracle here, Jesus was open. His friends were open. People create a climate of acceptance. This is what we have in the AA meetings and the Al-Anon meetings held in our church two or three nights of the week - an acceptance of each other. Any man or woman can come in as he is and find instant acceptance, and I hope and pray that the same is true of this congregation. I believe it is. It isn't pride that gets you in.

It is the warm acceptance of this cosmopolitan group that takes in anybody and holds him or her to Jesus for Him to heal their hurts, their paralysis.

#### A HELPER / A GUIDE

Second, Viktor Frankl says that the next thing in a healing experience (beyond this warm acceptance) is that you need someone who is a helper, who is a guide, a steady person you can call on, a person you can count on even when you abuse him, someone who can be to you like an older brother, a physician, a friend - like a sponsor, like a fellow Church member, like Jesus Christ.

And it takes faith to be helped by Jesus. It takes faith for Jesus to be the Helper. It takes faith for you to be a helper - in your Church, your town, your city, your office - wherever. So warmth comes by faith. Helping comes by faith.

#### HEALING FRICTION

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I'm sure that the man didn't expect that treatment. He wanted sympathy. Maybe he enjoyed the attention. Many people come to Church with the idea that somehow life can become perfect and blissful without cost. But everything does cost. Everything has hidden pain, its pressure and penalty, and you pay for that automatically in order to gain the good. Jesus said to the man, "Take up your bed and walk". And He is saying to the churches of our city, to the city of New York, to our land...He urges, "Don't lie down. This isn't the time to swing in your garden hammock. This is a time to pick up your bed and walk...and to do!" For it is in the healing friction, or the sense of a demanding goal, the drain our strain of struggle, or the sense of an impending cross that makes a person strong. So,

if you have a heartache this morning, bring it to Jesus and let Him by faith show you how to transcend it, because faith is a process.

### FAITH / PROCESS

Actually, faith is a level beyond feeling. Faith is a procedure beyond knowledge. Faith is an action beyond willing.

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Faith. Faith is throwing your heart out with your total personality being involved in it. It is interaction. It is a synthesizing of efforts. It is a participation of self. It is a commitment. And from a Christian point of view, faith is commitment of the knowledge that one has and commitment of the understanding one has about life to a further probing and developing of that knowledge. It takes courage to do so. And as someone has put it, "Faith is courage that has said its prayers". It takes choice and a commitment of the whole person. "The assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen".

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Faith then is a process where these men brought their sick friend to Jesus without any guarantee, and the sick man let himself be carried there without any guarantee. The whole process of faith is getting yourself involved with confident action so that it comes to its fruition. Now, let's go on to how you and I can increase our faith. Here, I have four points.

#### I. BY PRACTICE

We can increase our faith by practice. Every time you push an elevator button this week say to yourself, "I have faith".

You must know from experience that there is no guarantee an elevator will come - not even a church elevator. It is an act of faith. But faith involves pushing the button. Remember that. In every one of the healing miracles of Jesus, He put into it some contingency. He said to the blind man with mud on his eyes, "Go down to the pool and wash". To the paralytic, He said, "Take up your bed...rise...walk". To another, He said, "Stretch forth your hand". There is always faith-participation in a miracle. Some people wonder why they get nothing out of going to Church. It's the same principle. Faith involves the total person in the act or the process. You can practice it every day. Push the button!

#### II. GET YOURSELF OUT OF YOUR OWN WAY

Another thing is to get yourself out of your own way. Remember Jim Ryun, the miler of a few years back. He once ran the mile in 3.51 minutes. However, he once faltered in some races after setting the record. He explained this faltering by saying, "I had a minor psychological problem. I had to get myself out of the way".

As you and I run the race of life and as our Churches run their races this coming year, we need to get ourselves out of the way. This means, says Jesus, that your sins are forgiven - and those anxieties, those guilt feelings, those feelings

of low self-esteem, the questioning whether life is worthwhile are all overcome by faith in God's grace. All this corrosion of thought and feeling has to be overcome by faith in God's grace. This all has to be cleansed away, as one cleans a battery terminal in a car with bicarbonate of soda and flushes it away. Your sins are forgiven by the Lord Jesus if you will only believe in Him and trust Him!

### III STAY NEAR PEOPLE WITH FAITH

Another way to develop your faith is to stay near the people who have faith. There are a lot of expert skeptics and cynics today. Our city is full of them. Some have found their way into the churches of Jesus Christ. But that is an easy way to cop out. It takes a bold person to have faith. It is easy to sit back and say, "Show me".

You can always find a small minority group who have the faith to probe and move out and say, "Look, it can be done. We'll find a way to do it. People like that usually end up achieving things. Look through your list of friends and associates and make sure you have a good group like that in your circle. If you don't have friends with great faith, then maybe it's time for you to shuffle your list. Away with the prophets of doom and gloom. In with people of faith.

And let me add this thought. I think we also decrease our faith by all our presuppositions and presumptions. We turn people off when we say that we're too busy. This is almost like saying, "I don't believe in you" or declaring, "You can't do that". No one knows the great possibilities in another or in oneself. Our presumptions, our prejudices, our disobediences, our refusals can keep us from finding the full benefits of faith. Therefore, use these coming weeks to renew your attitude of faith. Let's live for the big issues and leave behind some of the trivial ones.

### IV. FINAL APPLICATION

And now the final application. I've tried to show you in this simple Bible story that Jesus healed the paralyzed man when He saw how strongly his friends believed He would help. I have tried to show you that faith is an active, participative thing.

One event I have always enjoyed in the circus is the triple somersault on the trapeze and the dead silence that comes over the Garden near the end when the drums roll and they stir up all your feelings. Then there is the dead silence as a man is about to fling himself through the air to be caught by a friend who is swinging from the other trapeze. All of a sudden in that dead and sweaty silence you hear the performer call "NOW" - as he leaps into space and the crowd breathes again as he completes his jump and catches the wrists of his friend. Friend, to me that is faith!

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As we now close in prayer, would you join with me in making a new commitment to Christ that we may use more faith than we know we have in our personal and public life. In the quietness of these moments and the privacy of our own inner life, will you prayer make that commitment now.

PRAYER

And so, dear Lord, we come once again to this place - this Church that means so much to us, and find faith and are sustained for life's struggle by our faith. We have more faith than we know if we but have the courage to make a fuller and a deeper commitment to Jesus in whom we find life's deepest meaning and its highest hope. Help us to live for the big issues in the days ahead...to leave behind the trivia that so often pulls us down and makes us less than we ought to be. And in so doing, may we bear much fruit and joy and bring healing to others. All of this in the name of Christ, our Lord. Amen

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TEXT: "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for,  
the conviction of things not seen".

(Hebrews 11: 1)

### INTRODUCTION

People go to school to learn how to ski, to play tennis, to cook.  
We should go to school to learn how to use faith.

The Biblical basis for this sermon is the miracle of our Lord performed when the paralytic was brought to Him. Four friends carried him on a sort of blanket or pallet. Since they could not get in the door because of the crowds, they went up the outside staircase to the flat roof, typical of that Eastern type of house and removed the tiles of the roof. Then they lowered the man down into the atrium in front of Jesus. A brief conversation took place between Jesus and the man and those around him. It concluded with Jesus saying "In order that you may know that I can forgive sins, I will say 'Rise up and walk'". The man did and everyone was amazed.

### HOW MUCH FAITH DO YOU HAVE?

It is out of this lesson that I would like to discuss faith with you as we enter a new season as persons and as a congregation. With this exciting prospect, let us first remember that the men who had the faith in this miracle were the four friends who were not sick. The paralytic had enough faith in his friends and it was transferred beautifully to Jesus. Jesus had enough faith in God that He was able to do this for the man who was ill. My question is: "How much faith do you have?"

Now, if you will analyze it, you really have more faith than you know. You live by faith ~~anyway~~. Can you transfer that daily exercise of faith to the deeper use of your faith in your religious life? Every time you get into a taxicab that is a faith miracle! Every time those of you who have automobiles get into them and turn the key to start the engine, that in itself is another faith miracle! I was in a public elevator the other day at Lenox Hill Hospital. It didn't move. We stood there. Someone said, "Why doesn't somebody do something? Terrible the way things are". A voice from the rear quietly said, "Has anybody pushed the button?" No one had.

What I'm saying is that simple faith is a necessary thing in daily life. In a sense it's the same as saving "grace" faith. The kind of faith we use in cars and elevators is akin to devotional faith. There's little difference between simple faith and saving faith, between daily faith and devotional faith.

### DEVELOPMENT

We've learned a lot about faith over the years. Some of the most helpful lessons were taught us by Viktor Frankl, the psychiatrist who was imprisoned in a concentration camp in Germany. He was confined with a group of physicians. They had a very upsetting experience. All their textbook learning taught them that certain environmental conditions should produce death, but it did not. For example, some of them were stripped of their clothes, were hosed down, were made to stand all night in the damp darkness and they thought they should have died from double pneumonia - but they didn't. The conditions were excruciating but somehow they survived them. At night when all was quiet, they surreptitiously met in the blackened barracks where they were forced to sleep, nine men side by side on a six-foot plank platform. They started to practice their medicine among their fellow prisoners. They began to see the great capacities

of life when all their textbooks and environmental reactions to their previous culture had said that they should be dead or dying. They found out that under those most severe and adverse conditions they were able to continue to live. They explained this new phenomenon by their faith reaching out and touching deeper dimensions of energy - of body, of soul, or mind, of social fellowship.

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ENVIRONMENT OF WARMTH First, the tremendous environment of warmth. In the healing miracle here, Jesus was open. His friends were open. People create a climate of acceptance. This is what we have in the two fine Alcoholics Anonymous meetings held in our community room every Monday and Friday nights - an acceptance of each other. Any man or woman can come in as he is and find instant acceptance, and I hope and pray that the same is certainly true of this congregation. I believe it is. It isn't pride that gets you in.

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There are a lot of expert skeptics and cynics today. Our city is full of them. Some have found their way into the churches of Jesus Christ. But that is an easy way to cop out. It takes a bold person to have faith. It is easy to sit back and say, "show me".

You can always find a small minority group who have the faith to probe and move out and say, "Look, it can be done. We'll find a way to do it." People like that usually achieve things. Look through your list of friends and associates and make sure you have a good group like that in your circle. If you don't have friends with great faith, then maybe it's time for you to shuffle your list.

Let me add this. I think we also decrease our faith by all our pre-suppositions and presumptions. We turn people off when we say that we're too busy. That is almost like saying, "I don't believe in you", or declaring, "you can't do that". No one knows the great possibilities in another or in oneself. Our presumptions, our prejudices, our disobediences, our refusals can keep us from finding the full benefits of faith. Therefore, use these coming weeks to renew your attitude of faith. Let's live for the big issues and leave behind some of the trivial ones.

### IV. FINAL APPLICATION

And now the final application. I've tried to show you in this Bible story that Jesus healed the paralyzed man when He saw how strongly his friends believed He would help. I have tried to show you that faith is an active, participative thing.

One event I especially like in the circus is the triple somersault on the trapeze and the dead silence that comes over Madison Square Garden near the end when the drums roll and they stir up all your feelings. Then there is the dead silence as a man is about to fling himself through the air to be caught by a friend who is swinging from another trapeze. All of a sudden in that dead, sweaty silence you hear the performer call "NOW" - as he leaps into space and the crowd breathes again as he completes his jump and catches the wrists of his friend. Friend - that is faith!

Most of us think that faith is knowledge. Faith is how you get knowledge. As soon as you get knowledge, then you go on to more faith. It is always a "leap" of faith. And so we go out into the world with faith, the same as we use in daily life. But now we put it in God, believing that He is a designer and implementer of life. We have faith in Christ that He does forgive our daily sins and gives us strength to be patient, loving and kind. We have faith in the Bible and faith in this congregation. We believe in each other.

We believed the Lord would have this Church play a powerful role of service to others. We have more faith than we know if we but have the courage to make the choice of full commitment to Him and to each other. We are only one Church, a small church, comparatively - but we have the faith to change people's lives by bringing them to Jesus Christ for the healing of the soul.

CLOSING As we now close in prayer, would you join with me in making a new commitment to Christ that we may use more faith than we know we have in our personal and our public life. In the quietness of these moments and the privacy of our own inner life, will you in pray make that comitment now.

PRAYER We come to this place, this Church, dear Lord, and find faith and are sustained by faith. We have more faith that we know if we but have the courage to make a fuller and deeper commitment to Jesus in whom we find life's deepest meaning and its highest hope. Help us to live for the big issues in the season ahead and to leave behind the trivial ones. In so doing, may we bear much fruit and bring healing to others. All in Christ's name.

Amen