

What is faith? In a little while, we will affirm our faith. We will affirm our faith by using a pretty intellectual response to the question from one of our Presbyterian creeds. We talk a lot about faith. We talk about having faith in God. About being faithful.

We use the word faith a lot in our teaching here. We just read a story in which Jesus is in a boat during a storm and after calming the storm he asks his disciples, "Have you still no faith?" There are many ways to try to understand faith but I think one of the best ways is with a story.

Many of you will remember Jill Duffield. Jill is a pastor who has supply preached here on a couple of occasions. She is now pastor at the Tirzah Presbyterian Church that straddles NC state line in Lancaster County. Jill tells about an experience she had returning from a conference that we both attended at White Oak Conference Center outside of Winnsboro.

When she returned home, her kids asked her, "What did you bring us? Mom, what'd you bring us?" Normally, Jill would have said, "Nothing. There is nothing to bring back from the Baptist retreat center. But this time, THIS time, Jill had the greatest gift of all to produce when prompted by their eager question. THIS time she said, "Well, I brought you this ... puppy. "

"A puppy! A puppy!" Screams of delight ensue, even when the puppy is more closely examined and the kids make note of the fact that they can see her ribs and count the vertebrae in her spine. "She can't stand," Jill tells them. "There is something wrong with her back legs and she has a nasty cut on the back of one leg." "Can we keep her? Can we keep her? All three clamor.

"It depends. We don't know what's wrong with her yet. She is pretty sick. We are going to have to take her to the vet and see what he has to say about her. I found her beside the road." "But then we can keep her, right?" "We'll see."

“Let’s go, then. Let’s take her to the vet,” Joseph, her son, says with authority, taking on the role of the injured puppy’s protector, gingerly wrapping her in a baby blanket and lifting her up. “We have to name her,” the children say. “Maybe we should wait,” Jill cautions. “Why?” They ask.

“Guys, she is very sick. She may not make it.” Mom tries to prepare them for the worst. “I know she’s going to be OK. I know she will!” chimes in Jessie, the middle child, the trusting and optimistic one of the family. Names are discussed between children and quickly they come to consensus: “Minnie.” “Yes, Minnie.” Let’s take Minnie to the vet.”

They go to the first vet and discover that the puppy is severely dehydrated. She will need to spend a few nights “in the hospital” in order to receive IV fluids and treatment for a whole host of parasites. She will need antibiotics for the nasty cut on her back leg. It is evident that there is something wrong with her back legs, what exactly is yet to be determined.

Results from the Parvo test will come back tomorrow. The vet warns that she is very sick. A positive Parvo test might be the news that seals her already tenuous fate. The family returns home, without the puppy, and wait.

The Parvo test comes back negative! She is eating and responding well to IV fluids. All the staff says she is very sweet. The entire Duffield household is eager to have Minnie home.

But then the vet informs them that he has good news and bad news. The good news is she is responding well to fluids and medication. The bad news is that both her back legs are badly broken. She will likely need surgery to fix them. Cost is \$3,500. “Can’t she just limp?” Jill asks in her most pastoral voice. “No, I’m afraid not Jill is told. If you decide not to do the surgery, she will need to be put down. Think about it and let me know later this afternoon.”

As the kids arrive home from school they ask in unison, "How's Minnie? Can she come home today?" Gulp. Jill tells them the news: she needs surgery. It will cost a lot of money. "How much?" Joseph asks. \$3,500. "Well," he says, "we have no other choice." "We have to get her the surgery." Gulp.

"I can give you all the money in my savings account," he offers. The others say that they will give what they have, too. Surely that will get the job done. What other choice do we have? Jill calls the vet. "Don't put her down. We're still thinking." The family decides to pick her up and at least have her home for the weekend.

Jill then takes Minnie the dog to another vet. She says that she can do the surgery for around \$1,000. What a deal! Reluctantly, Jill signs the papers for the surgery.

But then Jill gets a call before noon on Monday. "Pastor?" "Yes," "I have good news!" The vet is cheerful. "I took more x-rays and this little dog is starting to heal. She doesn't really need this surgery. If you take her home and limit her movement, she should be fine in a month or so.

She'll limp a little and her legs won't match, but really, other than that, she'll be fine. You can pick her up today if you'd like." The kids arrive home from school that day and are told that Minnie will be fine. Today, according to Jill, their dog Minnie is running and jumping on furniture and completely, totally well. Not even a limp.

What is faith? Faith is believing in something when all indicators tell you that this is not possible. Yes, we need to have our doubts at times in our lives. We need to doubt some things and be skeptical to what some people say to us and we need to be honest with our questions. We do not need to be gullible or stupid.

But sometimes we need a little bit more faith. A little bit more faith that God is in control. If a flea bitten half dead mutt in Fairfield County can be saved, then maybe, just maybe, God is involved in working out something good in your life as well.

Maybe, sometimes, we need to set aside our doubts and have a little bit of faith. AMEN.

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-Duffield, Rev. Jill, Presbyterian Outlook, June 8/15, 2009, p.9

-Text: Mark 4:35-41

-Given: August 2, 2009 in Allison Creek Presbyterian (York, SC)