

July 5, 2026
The Sixth Sunday after Pentecost

Zechariah 9:9-12
Psalm 145:8-15
Romans 7:15-25a
Matthew 11:16-19,25-30

Faith is not created in your heart or in your head. It's created in your commitments.

At first, it sounds counterintuitive. My first reaction when I heard this was...well of course faith is created my heart...where else would it be?

And then I realized something important. Faith...can be a powerful and influential thing to talk about. Something that feels good for our souls. It grounds us in an identity and groups us into communities. It also provides a sense of peace and purpose to who we are and who we want to be.

But faith isn't meant to reside in our hearts or our heads alone. Faith is meant to be lived. Faith comes alive when our commitment to faith embodies our practice of faith.

Let's talk about what that means.

Consider this idea...***faith is when we seek to become completely what God has placed within us.***¹

This is such a beautiful way to describe what faith is all about. A proactive, loving creative process that God has bestowed upon us. A gracious gift of belonging where God reaches down into our hearts and our heads and forms a life where we participate in God's desire for us. And that desire is the foundation of our faithful commitments.

It's the *process* of belief, a process of practice, a practice of coming back again and again to who we are called to be as followers of Christ.

But here is the challenge...We can *desire* to be a faithful person, to make faithful choices. We can long to become the person God wants us to be. But, getting there is often harder than it looks. We keep the theory of faith in our hearts and heads but stumble when it comes to bringing that faith to life.

Take a look at Romans 7. In verse 18 Paul is recognizing that he has set some faithful commitments for himself. He has outlined a practice. He says I can will what is right, (I can set that goal) but I cannot do it. And then in verses 22 & 23 he states, "*For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self (my heart and my head want to do the right thing)* ²³*but I see...another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin...*"

¹ This thought is from a course I am taking with Sarah Clarkson on her book *Reclaiming Quiet*. You can learn more about Sarah here: <https://sarahclarkson.com/>

You can almost hear his frustration. *I'm trying so hard, God, why can't I get it right?*

There is a deep, heartfelt seeking going on within Paul. He has faith in his heart and his head but he is struggling to consistently bring that faith into his commitments. He wants to live the faith that God has placed within him and yet he falls short of the goal time and time again.

So, why does he keep failing?

God, I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. I want to become completely what you have placed within me but I keep stumbling and falling right back into the same old patterns.

Does that feel like a truth within your own life? If so, you are not alone. That process of messing up is actually a very faithful path...if we can look honestly enough at ourselves and acknowledge our stumbling blocks. Moving our faith out of our heart and head and into our actions takes consistency and practice....and that includes our failures.

The Rev'd Edmund Harris from St. Thomas Church in Medina, Washington describes it like this...

"We know the experience of wanting to do one thing and finding ourselves doing another. We want to be patient, but we lose our temper. We want to be generous, but we cling tightly to what we have. We want to forgive, but we carry old grievances. We want to love our neighbors, but fear and prejudice get in the way.

He goes on to say...

*The contradictions Paul sees in himself can become embedded in an entire society. We can proclaim liberty while tolerating (or even propagating) injustice. We can celebrate equality while excluding some of our neighbors. We can speak of human dignity while turning away from those who are suffering or most vulnerable. We can honor freedom while failing to ask whether everyone truly has the opportunity to flourish."*²

So how do we move our commitments beyond those stumbling blocks? John Philip Newell said it well...we need to learn to read our own soul. To look deeply at what we believe and how we are living. He says we need to write down what we notice. Then compare what we notice to the life of Jesus. And ask ourselves...where do we see discord? Where are we stumbling? Where might we need help?

Because true commitment to any new way of living takes more than just our desire. It takes more than one right choice. It takes more than one confession. It takes honesty and consistency and it takes community.

² <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/sermon/freedom-for-proper-9-a-july-5-2026/>

Paul recognized that it's not enough to simply want to be a better person. It's not enough to simply hear what God's wants you to do. Remember Paul's point... Knowledge of the law isn't power to follow it. In verse 21 he says...the law is good, **and** even for those who delight in it, evil still lies close at hand.

That's the discord with Jesus that John Philip Newell was talking about. And recognizing that discord is ultimately where we find hope.

Because God has placed something beautiful within each of you. And God has no desire to condemn us to our failures. Instead, God opens his arms to encircle us with encouragement. Not to call out our weakness in faith but to embrace our commitment to faith.

We are all a work in progress. And the path of faithful progress will always be found in God's love for us.

Closing Prayer from the Iona Community

May the mind of God,
ever wiser than our minds,
search us deeply
and open us to the truths
that make for our healing.

May the ears of God
ever open to our prayers,
listen for us deeply
and hear, beneath our words,
our honest yearnings.

May the heart of God,
ever filled with costly love,
cherish us deeply,
mending any brokenness
and affirming our worth.

May God keep us company this day and bring us joy in our tomorrows. Amen.³

³ The Iona Community. *Iona Abbey Worship Book*. Rev. ed., Wild Goose Publications, 2017. p.118