

Believe what you can

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“People must believe what they can,” writes George MacDonald, “and those who believe more must not be hard on those who believe less.”

Faith is a gift. We don't produce it ourselves. We receive it. And we certainly can't brag about having more of it than other people do.

This wonderful passage from MacDonald is especially on my mind these days, when so many religious folks seem to boast about possessing faith and even a kind of certainty. I take comfort in what MacDonald says. I take even more comfort in the fact that Jesus passed through the Garden of Gethsemane on his way to the cross--and that the disciples were surprised and terrified when they first met the risen Christ.

God meets us where we are. And God gives us the faith we need to deal with life.

One of the most surprising aspects of faith is that it never does become my possession. If I pay attention to Luke and Acts, of course, this should not surprise me.

The disciples who meet Jesus after his resurrection are surprised and amazed. The disciples, who then go forth into the world as his witnesses, still struggle from time to time with trusting God as God continues to open to them new, resurrected realities--for example, the inclusion of Gentiles in the faith of Jesus Christ.

Frederick Buechner once observed that faith “is on-again-off-again rather than once-for-all. Faith is not being sure where you're going but going anyway.” Certainly the testimony of Luke-Acts bears this out.