

What do I believe?

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What do I believe?

I oftentimes forget what I believe, until I stop to ask. People may assume I have my beliefs all figured out, given my profession as clergy. But I could ask myself this question every day. And every day the answer might be different. Some days I don't ask at all, which is a shame—a waste of thoughtfulness—a missed opportunity for introspection—a day of going through the motions. I have too many of these kinds of days.

What do I believe?

I don't believe in myself. So I sure hope there is someone else at work to make up for me.

What do I believe?

When I've had at least eight hours of sleep, I believe in myself. I believe my actions matter and that my words can influence.

What do I believe?

When complications arose during my daughter's birth, I didn't believe God could pull out the baby stuck in my womb. In fact, I'm not sure God was present at all in that terrifying moment. I needed someone, though, so I turned to my husband. I pulled his ear close and whispered my prayers to him.

What do I believe?

I believe God was present after Tom died of diabetes. I hesitated in the door to his hospital room where his body lay in the bed, covered halfway by a white sheet tucked neatly under his arms. His widow, Diane, was sitting beside him. Even in the doorway I could feel that the room was thick with something. Sadness, yes, and the weight of loss, but something else, too. Or rather, something more. Someone else

might describe it differently. Or not experience it at all. But I named it “God” because it felt like love to me. I swam through it, like molasses in the sterile, hospital air, to sit beside Diane and take her hand. Overcome, I prayed a halting, ineloquent prayer. Driving home afterwards, the experience clung to me like a stranger’s sweet cologne.

What do I believe?

I believe in evil. It’s not some shadowy figure out to get me, but it can present itself at any given moment: in the social inequity that confronts me every time I drive by the local, maximum-security prison and see all the African-American faces in the yard; in the image that haunts me of a young man in an orange jumpsuit, kneeling before his hooded executioner; in the degradation of our climate and in cruelty to animals; in all the ways we humans could do better, but don’t.

What do I believe?

I believe in the wisdom of the newborn sparrow who surprised me, unballing himself at the end of my driveway as I was heading out for a run. I had mistaken him for a leftover clump of dead grass. His feet, each with three long, hooked toes, were bigger than his whole body. He stood, and cocked his scruffy head to get a good look at me. Directly above his eyes, a shock of feathers stood up like a scruffy cowlick, or a bad case of bedhead. Thinking he must have just fallen from his nest, I wondered what I should do about this tiny life? He, perhaps, was wondering the same about me. Where are his parents? I scanned the trees around our yard, full of maniacal chirping. No one came to claim him, though. Or at least, not while I was around. Are you my responsibility, or do I leave you for another? Where are we in this world together? Then, he surprised me again, unfolding two tiny wings from the ball of his body, and he flew.

What do I believe?

I believe everything, God included, is in process. Towards what, I don’t know, because I also believe in mystery. But I hope (maybe even believe) it is somewhere beautiful.

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