

The God We Can Believe In

by Bishop Mariann(<https://edow.org/author/mebudde/>) | Jun 15, 2025

Jesus said to the disciples, "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you."

John 16:12-15

Let me begin by wishing all fathers a very happy Father's Day. May we give thanks for all the fathers and father figures of our lives.

Special blessings to all of St. Paul's Baden on this occasion when we officially celebrate and give thanks for the new season of ministry that began *nine months ago* when the Rev. Peter Antoci came to be your rector. From all accounts, it has been a good beginning indeed—and for that I am especially grateful. And a warm welcome to our guests in worship today—you have joined us on a great day.

I received an email this week from St. Paul's senior warden, Mr. Darrin Palmer, who couldn't be in church with us today because of a family gathering in honor of his father-in-law's 90th birthday. He wanted to greet me personally, and to share his experience of St. Paul's under Peter Antoci's leadership.

Father Peter has been with St. Paul's Parish now for nine months. He has been amazing! While forging this new shared staff ministry, he has managed to permit the two parishes to keep their identities and blend on opportunities that make practical sense and/or strengthen our larger community by bringing us together. We recently met with Reverend Amanda Akes-Cardwell (a member of diocesan staff) for a six month review and the collective comments from the vestry were glowing... You should know the tremendous job Fr. Peter is doing in our church.

Darrin also recounted a bit of Peter's sermon from last Sunday, the feast of Pentecost, which highlights the part of God that we experience as Spirit. Peter invited those present to take note of your breath—to breathe deeply in and out.

Feel the power of God breathing life into your lungs. Grasp that power of creation which gives you life. Raise your hand to your mouth and blow on it. Feel it: That is as close as GOD is to you every moment of every day. There is God... Every time we breathe in, we breathe the life of God. Every



time we breathe out, we share that power with the world around us. If only we could only remember this, our world would be a better place.

Peter also told of a time when, due to a case of pneumonia, his body forced him to slow down. Struggling to breathe, he became aware of what a miracle it is to breathe. Paying attention to his breath, helped him experience the grace of God. He reminded us of something we can easily forget: the Spirit's presence isn't something we earn. It is with us always, as close as our breath.

Peter's message was particularly meaningful for me, because I sprained my foot ten days ago, which forced me to slow down during one of the busiest seasons of my life. At first, a part of me panicked—how on earth was I to get everything done? Reading about the time Peter was reminded that God was as close as his breath, and his sense of God being with him as he healed allowed me to relax a bit, lean into rest, and trust in God.

Building on Peter's description of the Holy Spirit last week, I invite you to consider what it means for you to believe in God, and more specifically, how your life experience has informed the kind of God that you believe in, or the God you struggle to believe in, or don't believe in.

Sometimes members of my family or various friends will tell me that while they respect me and my vocation, they themselves don't believe in God. When I ask them to describe the God they don't believe in, I'll respond by saying that I don't blame them, and that I don't believe in that God, either. And they didn't come up with the images of God they are rejecting on their own—someone told them or taught them to believe in this way.

To be clear, with the word *belief*, I'm not speaking about intellectual certainty, but rather where we place our trust. We can have all manner of doubt about the things we cannot explain or fully understand, and still believe, still have faith. Belief, or faith, in the spiritual sense isn't the opposite of doubt, but rather where we choose to place our trust, in the midst of doubt.

You may remember a story in the gospels in which a desperate father approaches Jesus with his sick child, asking for healing. "All things are possible for those who believe," Jesus told him. The father replied, "I believe! Help my unbelief." (Mark 9:24) He wanted to place his trust in Jesus even in his fear and longing for his child to be made well.

The church musician Mark Miller wrote a song about the kind of belief as trust I'm describing here. The song is based on a poem that was found scratched on the wall of a World War II concentration camp:

I believe in the sun. I believe in the sun, even when, even when it's not shining.

I believe in love. I believe in love, even when, even when I don't feel it.

I believe in God, even when, even when God is silent.¹

Such statements of belief in emptiness are built on other moments when, in fact, the sun was shining, when love was deeply felt, and when God did speak in ways that prompted belief—not merely as affirmation of an idea, but as something, and someone, real, that can be trusted, even in absence.

So let's think about those moments, shall we?



Think back on your life and call to mind, if you can, an experience that you would define as a holy moment, a God moment, as some call it. Can you think of a time when you felt touched or inspired, or spoken to, somehow, by a presence you associate with the mystery that we call God?

When I've done this exercise in a small group setting where people can talk about their experiences, while there is great variety, the experiences generally fall into a few overarching categories. I wonder if one or more of these is true for you.

The first broad category is of experiences of holiness in the natural world, where the beauty and the grandeur of nature evoke a sense of awe and transcendence—it might be gazing at the stars, or walking along a beach, or looking from a high mountain. For good reason, spending time in nature is important for our spiritual well being, to be reminded of the grandeur of this world and God as the Creator of all.

The second is that of human relationships and human love. A teenager in a Confirmation class I taught years ago spoke of the love he witnessed between his grandparents as being holy for him. Parents often describe the miracle of the birth of their children, or the wonder of watching them grow. Sociologists suggest that it is maternal and paternal love that first inspired religious impulses in the earliest evolutions of human beings. We see something of God's love in the love we share, which is why Jesus, coming to us as God in human form, is foundational to the Christian faith.

A third broad category is that of a more mystical encounter, what the prophet Elijah experienced as “the still small voice” of God, that is, God's presence in silence or struggle, and answered prayer—not in the sense of getting what we want necessarily, but of feeling that we are not alone. This is God as spirit, as close as our breath, as Peter reminded us last week.

This is also the part of God that beckons us, inspires us, even summons us to do certain things, and to live our lives a certain way. That sense of being summoned is, for me, a foundational faith experience, especially when what I sense God is asking me to do feels impossible. One poet described faith as the call “to do what is hard as if it were easy.”

There are other categories of holy experiences, to be sure, and experiences that have no category. The ones I've mentioned here are at the heart of the Christian faith from which our ancient affirmations of faith, like the one we will soon recite together, were born:

God as Creator, God as loving Father. God as Jesus, the one who comes to us as one of us. God as Spirit, as close as our breath.

The important thing to remember about our statements of our faith is that they are grounded in human experience, the experiences of the great mystery we call God.

What I want to leave you with is an invitation to name for yourself and hold in your heart your own experiences of holiness and grace, of spiritual connection or hunger. Name them. Then hold those experiences in conversation with the great stories and practices of our faith. What those stories and practices can do is help us interpret our own experiences, and as a result, grow in our capacity to know and love God, and to become more loving ourselves.



That's on us, actually, how much we choose to go deeper in faith, to grow in love and understanding. You now have a spiritual leader in Peter who wants nothing more than for you to know and love the God who knows and loves you, and to share with God the awesome responsibility of loving others and healing our world.

A fourth is the experience of holiness in community, and in particular faith community, the wondrous things that can happen among us as we gather in collective prayer and commitment. We aren't meant to walk the life of faith alone.

So do your part, as best you can, and trust that God is with you, among you, for you at St. Paul's, and through you for others' sake. Take note of your experiences and longings, and follow where they lead. Let go of the images of God that you can't believe in, and move toward the ones you can. Remember that the definition of belief isn't the absence of doubt but the willingness to trust and to give one's heart.

You can put your trust in God your Creator made known to us in Jesus, and whose Spirit is with us always. And you can trust the goodness of this community. You are blessed by the gift of each other.

Amen.

¹ *I Believe* (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LmtlZHEHPd4>), music video by Mark Miller

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