

An old farmer always called his hogs to the feeding trough by hitting it with a piece of wood. Tap-tap-tap. That's all it took and they would come running. It was a great system, until, for some odd reason, he noticed them losing weight. He couldn't understand it. Then one day, he discovered the culprit. A woodpecker was pecking on a tree nearby. Every time the woodpecker pecked, tap-tap-tap, the hogs came running. I guess all that extra running kept them trim.

The people of Israel were no different from you and me. They were constantly looking for signs. The problem was, they had difficulty telling the difference between the sound of the farmer with food and the sound of the woodpecker tapping on a tree. **So, it is with people who rely on signs and miracles rather than the Word of God.**

Jesus said, "***an evil and adulterous generation continues to look for a sign.***" (Matthew 12:39) But we all do it. You stub your toe on the way to the kitchen in the morning and you moan, "It's going to be a bad day." It rains on the day of a wedding and we say, "This marriage is going to have problems." It's human nature. We attach significance to events in which, in reality, there is no significance. We think it's the call of the farmer, when it's only a woodpecker. And we wonder why the trough of our lives is so empty.

There is a beautiful story of Robert Bruce, who was crowned king of Scotland in 1306. Bruce, after being routed by the English, was confined on the island off the coast of Antrim in Ireland. To pass the time, Bruce watched a spider trying to fix its web to a beam on the ceiling. The spider failed six times. "Now shall this spider," said Bruce, "teach me what I am to do, for I also have failed six times." In the seventh attempt, the spider succeeded in fixing its web to the beam. Bruce took it as a sign, gathered a handful of followers and returned to Scotland. After a series of successful campaigns, he won the battle of Bannockburn in 1314 after which England acknowledged the complete independence of Scotland. And it was all because of a spider. In fact, to this day, to kill a spider in Scotland, or wherever the superstitious Scotch may be, is still supposed to bring the offender all kinds of bad luck.

Now, I need to warn you. It would be very risky for you to start making your decisions on the behavior of spiders that you might find in your cellar, or yard, or wherever. Spiders are just spiders. Robert Bruce could have gone back to Scotland and been defeated soundly by the British. Signs are notoriously fickle. They are for superstitious people. They are not for Christians.

And yet . . . we keep making the same mistake as the people of Israel . . . and every other people on earth. Looking for a sign.

It's interesting. Jesus had just performed an extraordinary miracle--the feeding of the 5,000. You would think that this would have convinced the people that he was the one they had been awaiting. But it was not enough. That is why God doesn't reveal himself in signs and wonders. They are never enough. We always seek more. We find ways to explain away even the most dramatic acts. The rising of the sun each morning, the gentle opening of the flowers in springtime, the birth of a new baby--**these signs ought to be evidence enough for anyone to accept belief in a Creator, but they are not. We always demand more.**

Now the people wanted a sign that Jesus was the Messiah. "***What miraculous sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you?***" they asked. "***What will you do? Our forefathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written: 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'***"

Jesus said to them, "***I tell you the truth, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.***"

"Sir," they said, "from now on give us this bread." Then Jesus declared, "***I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.***"

What does this mean? It means that faith in Christ does not depend on signs and miracles. Faith in Christ is an inner assurance that whatever comes, **God is with us.**

FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST IS ROOTED IN GOD'S LOVE.

Do you know that God loves you? The truth of the matter is that most of us THINK that God loves us, but we are not sure. And if something should happen to tip the evidence one way or the other, then that's the way our faith will turn.

Cassie Bernall, a 17-year-old student at Columbine High School, was killed in the worst disaster in U.S. high school history. The Denver Rocky Mountain News wrote, "People around the world know Cassie as the Columbine student who died confessing her faith. Her killer asked her if she believed in God. She told him she did, then died at 17." What if you were Cassie's family? Could you handle that and still believe in a loving God?

And what about Arthur Ashe, the late, great champion tennis player who acquired AIDS through a blood transfusion at the time he underwent heart surgery? The medical personnel in the hospital did not suspect or inspect the unit of HIV contaminated blood which went into Ashe's veins. Ashe did not realize that he was infected with the dreaded virus until five years later when he first suffered numbness and then growing paralysis in his playing arm. The diagnosis was a brain tumor. This stay in the hospital for surgery revealed that he had contracted AIDS. After being released from the hospital, the seventh-ranked tennis star in all the world had to face rumors about his condition as well as deal with retirement from his beloved sport. Arthur Ashe resisted the temptation to be angry at God. Who could have blamed him if he had been? In 1992, he addressed the students at the Niagara County Community College and testified that despite having his disease, his trust in God was firm. Ashe knew that regardless of the outcome, God would remain with him in his ordeal.

What an amazing testimony of faith. Could you do that? Is your faith that strong? You see, many, if not most of us, are insecure about God's love. If things are going our way, if the children are healthy, if the house payment is made, if things are going well on the job--then yes, God is with us. But let sickness come, or financial adversity, or an attack of the blues for any reason, and then we begin to doubt. We start looking for a sign. Has it all been a mistake? Is God really with me?

Corrie ten Boom was arrested in Holland for sheltering Jews from the Nazis. She was transported to a death camp in Germany. She was subjected to all manner of humiliation and torture. She watched her sister die there. And yet later **Corrie ten Boom would write, "However deep the pit, God's love is deeper still."**

Christian faith is rooted in God's love. The Old Testament Character Job experienced all manner of grievous misfortunes. He lost his health, he lost his children, he lost his great wealth--and yet he was able to cry out, *"Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him . . ."* (Job 13:15) Later he exclaims, *"Oh, that my words were recorded, that they were written on a scroll, that they were inscribed with an iron tool on lead, or engraved in rock forever! I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes--I, and not another."* (19:23-27)

That's faith. Not dependent on external circumstances but on an internal assurance. Christian faith is rooted in God's love.

CHRISTIAN FAITH IS ALSO ROOTED IN GOD'S LAW.

We live in a lawful universe. We drop a book, and it falls to the floor. Why? The law of gravity. We drive a car off a ledge and we smash into the canyon floor below. Does a Divine hand reach out of the clouds to stop our fall? It could happen, I suppose. Anything is possible with God. But it is not likely. We live in a lawful universe. And what a magnificent universe it is.

Writer Laura Ingalls Wilder, author of the much-beloved Little House on the Prairie series puts it this way: "What a beautiful world this is! Have you noticed the wonderful coloring of the sky at sunrise? For me there is

no time like the early morning, when the spirit of light broods over the earth at its awakening. What glorious colors in the woods these days! Did you ever think that great painters have spent their lives trying to reproduce on canvas what we may see every day? Thousands of dollars are paid for their pictures which are not so beautiful as those nature gives us freely. The colors in the sky at sunset, the delicate tints of the early spring foliage, the brilliant autumn leaves, the softly-colored grasses and lovely flowers--what painter ever equaled their beauties with paint and brush?"

Do you understand that creation works the way it does because God structured it to obey certain laws? That is why we can expect the sun to rise tomorrow morning at just the time it is supposed to. If it did not, every molecule in the universe would likely be affected. We simply are foolish when we ask God to suspend any of His laws even for a minute. Life upon this earth depends on those laws. Intellectually I think all of us understand that. And yet, we still pray, "Please, Lord. Don't let it rain on my daughter's wedding." We would be better off praying, "Please, Lord, regardless of the weather, help me to have a positive attitude so that I can radiate the kind of cheerfulness that will make this a great day for the people I love."

Christian faith is rooted in God's love and God's law. That includes God's moral law. Someone described us long ago as people who sow our wild seeds and then pray for a crop failure. That's not the way life works, unfortunately. Yes, God is a God of grace and forgiveness, but there are laws governing human behavior, just as there are laws governing the rising of the sun. When we run afoul of those laws, people suffer. We can be forgiven. We are still admitted to paradise on the last day, but that does not change the fact that sin brings suffering.

Christian faith is rooted in God's love and in God's law.

MOST IMPORTANT, CHRISTIAN FAITH IS ROOTED IN GOD'S REVELATION.

Christian faith is not a philosophy. No one sat down and thought this stuff up. **Christian faith is rooted in God's revelation.** When we could not reach up to God, God reached down to us in Jesus Christ. What is it that distinguishes Christian faith from every other religion and philosophy of life? Only one thing, the person of Jesus Christ. We believe that indeed he is the bread which came down from heaven.

The Hebrew Bible--which we call the Old Testament--we share that with our Jewish friends. We even share it with our Moslem adversaries, as well as our Moslem friends. Moslems even accept Jesus, as a prophet. What makes us unique is that we boldly claim that in Jesus Christ we get a definitive picture of God. This is what God is like! We exclaim. God is like Jesus. Jesus is God in human flesh. It is an extraordinary claim, but we stake our lives upon it. So, it is not good enough for us to proclaim, as do the followers of Islam as well as the nation of Israel, "***An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.***" (Deuteronomy 19:21) That's Old Testament, not New. We cite the words of our Lord in the Sermon on the Mount, "You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' ***But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you. You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven.***"

This is what sets Christians apart. We may forget it in times of national emergency, but this is our faith. We believe in Jesus. We believe he is the Son of God. We believe that what he says is true. **He is the bread that came down from heaven to feed our souls. We ask no more than to live for him.**

Christian faith is rooted in God's love. Christian faith is rooted in God's law. Christian faith is rooted in God's revelation in Jesus Christ our Lord. We aren't distracted by the sound of a woodpecker. We don't need a sign.

We are fed directly from the Father's hand—THE BREAD OF LIFE! Amen.