

Nearly six- and one-half years ago, when I moved to Maine, I was “gifted” with two colloquial sayings, and one present that remains tucked in the pocket behind the driver’s seat in my car. The first saying was presented after having been taken on several road trips, around the mid coast area – not yet having moved here. We’d been at 5 Islands Lobster in the Georgetown area for a late lunch. It was after 4 o’clock in the afternoon when we were leaving. I wanted to head to Land’s End Gift Shop on Bailey Island. (I’d seen something there I wanted to pick up for a friend.)

“Oh, we’ll never make it before they close at 5 o’clock. At this time of day, **You can’t get there from here** in less than an hour.” We’d have to travel from Georgetown to Bath, to Cooks Corner, and turn left for a long drive down Route 24 to Bailey Island.

And there it was the first colloquial gift! **You can’t get there from here.**

When I moved to the rural town of Dresden, I quickly learned how true that colloquial saying proved to be! While living in the Seattle area, I’d relied heavily on a phone app that worked as my GPS. **WAZE** not only guided me but showed me faster routes and alerted me to possible traffic backups. Rural Maine could not do the same. In the years before 5G cell reception, I was often lost on the backroads as cell reception cut out and I quickly lost my “travel guide”!

After just one public cry for assistance, I was given a valuable present: My own **GAZETEER!** According to my neighbors, unless you were heading into the cities . . . the rural roads in Maine have most likely not changed since the last publication of this cartographic guide. In my short life here in Maine, I have never had reason to lose faith in this book!

The second colloquial gift came the first time I needed help with something at the house – that demanded more skills than a screwdriver, hammer, or wrench set! Like before, I was accustomed to going to my phone, finding the right app, and sending a message to a service provided describing my domestic needs. Before they changed their name: I was a “frequent flyer” with **ANGIE’S LIST** (now just, **ANGI!**) A couple descriptive sentences, my contact information, and within 24 hours crafts people would call.

That didn’t happen in Dresden, Maine!

Again, to my rescue, came a cadre of neighbors. And from their reaching out to me came what I quickly learned was their collective response: “**I know a [guy]** . . .” Which, for gender relevant reasons, I have changed to, “**I know someone . . .**” And, sure enough, know people they did!

Before the first big snowfall, there was already someone scheduled to plow the drive each time it snowed. Before I was able to purchase a lawnmower, there was someone ready with their zero-turn riding mower! In the fall of 2017, when the wild winds had down so much forest that our little area was without power for almost a week; the generator stopped running. My closest neighbor came to the rescue. Their [guy] would come and do the repair work. Two miracles

occurred that week: The generator was fixed, and I learned how to check the gauge on the propane tank to know how low the level was dropping – and at what point I needed to call and ask for a refill of the tank. The greatest gift received from this second colloquial saying came when I called my neighbors and said, "Nothing's coming out of the faucets except brown water."! They gave me the number of their well guy. I called. And within 24 hours, a new well pump was installed, and all was right with the world.

Other than the anxiety-causing realities of two important machines NOT working in your house (the generator, which was a bonus of sorts, and the well pump which was incredibly important for everything connected to life at the house) – the connectedness to the community felt very familiar. Having grown up in a small town, living out in the country; this attitude was a way of connecting.

The confession around not being able to get there from here was foreign, having grown up in the Midwest, not in an area where land formations jut into the Atlantic Ocean like appendages. And truly you can't get to the closest town if both are separated by bodies of water – without following roadways that take you in and around.

However, I was immediately comforted the first time I heard a neighbor say, "I know a guy . . ." I believed that in their knowing, they were offering a person who had done work for them. I learned in these rural areas, that this was sometimes family members they would recommend. If they were satisfied with the work they'd done at their own homes, I was sure I would be satisfied, too. (Only once did I have to question the recommendation of a neighbor. But – I am a stickler for clean lines where wall meets baseboard or ceiling!

On a human level, I had placed my faith in these people who stepped into my life to offer guidance. I trusted their history with having lived in this region. I trusted their judgment of others who were coming to assist me.

Some might call it blind faith.

Here we are again, this week, with a word that teeters between the rational and the spiritual. John offered an understanding of hope that took us beyond a possible synonym for wish. Hoping in what we often cannot control and holding onto a belief that those hopes will come to fruition. And in their fruition, they may be realized long after those expressing or being promised that hope have died.

Faith seems to be the unnamed belief, a conviction. The inference of having faith tells people that you trust in something often despite real proof. **Hebrews 11: 1** tells us exactly that! Faith most often focuses on a specific belief or set of beliefs. Having faith around these beliefs tend to be long-term and durable. Faith disorders our emotions! It challenges and confounds. Faith steadies us and is the foundation from which we experience our moral and ethical dimensions. Faith is both introvert and extrovert. Faith is dynamic.

This morning's text is an "honor roll" of faithful people.

Hebrews 11: 1-40 is a litany. Abel, Enoch, and Noah. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Esau, Joseph, and Moses. Samuel and David, Samson, Gideon, Barak and Jephthah.

As written, and reflective of those doing the writing, the majority of those named among these 40 verses are men.

Two noteworthy exceptions being:

Sarah, Abraham's spouse, and eavesdropper who "laughed" when the visitors told Abraham she (in her old age) would bear a child. And Rahab who came to Joshua's assistance before the walls came tumbling down, preserving her family's safety.

Each of these people named in this text have their own story of faith written in the Hebrew scriptures. Some more popular if you will. However, each person acts according to their faith. If you read their stories, you'll understand that in their expressions of faith could be found moments of disbelieving and disowning the God of their ancestors.

One of my favorite stories of faith is the tale of Gideon's visit with the Angel of the Lord. In Gideon's encounter with this visitor, he demanded proof that this truly was a messenger from God. Gideon demanded three miracles. An angelic apparition and a fiery rock, plus two different miracles that involved a sheep's fleece and the morning dew. Imagine being visited by God's messenger and wanting proof beyond sitting in the presence of the Divine!

John talked last week of people like Moses and Abraham called by God, sent forth on their journeys, holding onto hope around promises made by this God. Faithful, yet sometimes doubt-filled or denying. Moved by promises. Yet never seeing those promises brought to fruition in their lifetime. Hope, stirred by faith.

I have grown to appreciate the Hebrew scriptures. From the first walk in the Garden, God stays alongside those created in the Divine image. The faith stories of each person named in this text from Hebrews describes not just a person whose response to God is a faith-filled, "Yes!" These people named here have stories that include doubt and denial. Their journeys expose what we all face: Our faith is private and public, it is given when our souls feel able to let go, it is freely shared – most of the time, but it can be a guarded truth, too.

I am reminded of something the author, C.S. Lewis says in his book, "**Mere Christianity**." He writes:

*I am not asking anyone to accept Christianity if his best reasoning tells him that the weight of evidence is against it. That is not the point at which faith comes in. But supposing a man's reason once decides that the weight of the evidence is for it. I can tell that man what is going to happen to him in the next few weeks. There will come a moment when there is bad news, or*

*he is in trouble, or is living among a lot of other people who do not believe it, and all at once his emotions will rise up and carry out a sort of blitz on his belief.*

*Now faith, in the sense in which I am here using the word, is the art of holding onto things your reason has once accepted, in spite of your changing moods. For moods will change, whatever view your reason takes.*

*Now that I am a Christian, I do have moods in which the whole thing looks very improbable; but when I was an atheist, I had moods in which Christianity looked terribly probable. This rebellion of your moods against your real self is going to come anyway. That is why faith is such a necessary virtue; unless you teach your moods "where they get off" you can never be either a sound Christian or even a sound atheist, but just a creature dithering to and fro, with its beliefs really dependent on the weather and the state of its digestion. Consequently one must train the habit of faith.* C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, ch. 12

How we walk in faith reminds me of that colloquial saying I was taught almost seven years ago: "You can't get there from here." Our faith walk stops and starts, goes forward and then reverses. It comes to a halt, it slows to a crawl, it may even end without ending. This morning, especially, as we surround ourselves in the light of the great cloud of witnesses. We remember and celebrate men and women of faith. Some we have walked alongside; some we are just welcoming this morning. They got here, by faith!

The final two verses of Chapter 11 state:

**"<sup>39</sup>Yet all these, though they were commended for their faith, did not receive what was promised, <sup>40</sup>since God had provided something better so that they would not, without us, be made perfect. "**

This speaks to a core tenet of our Christian faith: God's revelation is ongoing. We are called to believe that this world is constantly recreating its whole. New earth, new birth. This passage will hold true whether read today, or 25 years from today.

The authors of the book of Hebrews (writing we believe to a Jewish audience) speak to their faith's understanding that God will provide something better. We will all be made perfect in God's sight. The writers of this text were, most likely, working to connect the Jewish ancestors that came before Jesus, to a post-Resurrection community who had been shown the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

This morning, in the company of the communion of saints, we can take this understanding one step further. In the verse Shawn read from the gospel of John: ". . . **Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?**"

And my faith-filled response is: "I know someone . . . who will change your heart."