

## SERMON

## Can we be “Out of Control Disciples” Faithing Our Way Down the Road?

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Maya Angelou. A heroine of mine, a woman of extra-ordinary life; poet, writer, performer, teacher and director of film, civil rights activist. The many accomplishments came to her as she so wisely walked the journey of her life pain. And there was a lot of it. She says,

“There is an African American, song 19<sup>th</sup> century, which is so great, it says, ‘when it looked like the sun wasn’t going to shine any more, God put a rainbow in the clouds.’ Imagine, and I’ve had so many rainbows in my clouds. I’ve had a lot of clouds, but I’ve had so many rainbows, and one of the things I do when I step upon the stage, when I stand up to translate, when I go to teach my classes, when I go to direct a movie, I bring everyone who has ever been kind to me with me; black, white, Asian, Spanish speaking, native American, gay, straight, everybody, I say, ‘come with me, I need you now, I am going on the stage.’ I say ‘come with me, I need you now, ‘long dead, you see, so that I don’t ever feel I have no help. I have had rainbows in my clouds. And the thing to do it seems to me is to prepare yourselves, so you can be a rainbow in someone else’s cloud. Someone who may not look like you, may not call God the same name you call God, if they call God at all. You see. They might not eat the same dishes prepared way you do. May not dance your dances, or speak your language. But be a blessing to somebody. That’s what I think.”

Maya Angelou is an “out of control disciple” faithing her way down the road of life. Maya died in May of 2014, but her legacy will live on forever in the spirits and hearts of all those who have the courage to live lives of faithing.

A noun, faith, and a verb, faithing! A noun, “I place my faith in God!” Faith – the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. As some of you know, I grew up near the shores of Lake Winnebago. I spent many hours as a child along its shores – my introspective self always pondering, feeling the moods of the lake, which somehow connected with my moods. Sitting and looking across at the distant shore and wondering. The image of the distant shore changed, shifted, with the mood of the lake, clear when the air was clear, muffled when the air was heavy. Faith as a horizon. The assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. I place my faith in God. Later it came to be, I lived on the shores of Lake Superior. An awesome lake. No distant shoreline in view. Each day as I looked out at that immense body of water it hanged form. On some days there was a definitive difference between the body of water and the clear sky, with the horizon drawing a clear line between the two. On other days I needed to strain my eyes and then, and only then, I was able to distinguish between the sea and the sky. On many other days there was absolutely no differentiating between the sky and the sea – they became one. No distant shore in sight. As you look over the water, what you see extends without end in front of you. Faith – the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. I place my faith in God.

If I set sail on a day when differentiation is impossible, where does the sky meet the sea? On such a day it is not possible to find a point of destination. One would have to trust that the destination was out there somewhere. It would be a journey of faith. It would require strength, courage, risk taking and love. Somewhere out there is the reality which is invisible to the eye. Somewhere out there is the other shore. Somewhere out there is the end of that rainbow.

Physical eyesight produces evidence of visible things; faith, is the trust which convinces us, or enables us to see the invisible. Faith – the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. I place my faith in God. Faith as a noun. But there is so much more. I believe as recipients of faith, as given by the gift of God’s unconditional love for us all, we are responsible for ourselves and the rest of God’s creation. We are to become out of control disciples. We are required to practice faithing! Faithing as a verb. (In writing this sermon every time I use faithing as a verb, spell check goes crazy. Too bad spell check, add faithing to your vocabulary.) St. Augustine wrote that to have faith is to believe what you can’t see and the reward of faith is to see what you believe. I believe that God loves all of creation, you, me, every soul, every creature, the water, the soil, the plants the trees. The gift of God’s unwaivering faith in all of creation, came to fruition for Christians in the birth of Jesus, in the faithing of his earthly life and the mysterious, divinity of the Christ of faith. Faith means more than personal trust. Faithing gives us the courage, the strength and, most importantly, the hope to keep on keeping, keeping on through the pain, the disappointment, the fear of our lives. And as we find the courage, the strength and, most importantly, the hope to keep on keeping through the pain, the disappointment, the fear of our lives (personally and collectively) we are called to be out of control disciples faithing our way in our families, in our communities, in our nation and in the world. God is calling our names, God needs all our help, Jesus is begging us to follow protect the environment, care for the poor, embrace diversity, reject racism, forgive often, love God, fight for the powerless, share earthly and spiritual resources and hope in the future. How we doing in our faithing?

Who can we count on anymore? Who can we trust? We are living in a world where trust is one of our most endangered virtues and values. In the midst of the world’s trust crisis, to a people suffering a trust deficit, it is time to announce at the top of our lungs, “In God we trust!” And if that is so, we need to respond! We are needed by God.

Leonard Sweet, recovering addict, one time dean of the theological school at Drew University in a wonderful book, [A cup of Coffee at the Soul Café](#), talks about his transformation from an addict to an out of control disciple. He wrote his “Magna Carta of Trust” and posted it for all to see in a church culture of “professionally religious men and women with too little personal faith in, and relationship with, Jesus of Nazareth to let go and let God. (pg. 168)

“I am part of the Church of the Out-of-Control. I once was a control junkie, but now I am an out-of-control disciple. I’ve given up my control to God. I trust and obey the Spirit. I’ve jumped off the fence; I’ve stepped over the line; I’ve pulled out all the stops; I’m holding nothing back. There’s no turning back, looking around, slowing down, backing away, letting up, or shutting up. It’s a life against the odds, outside the box, over the wall, the game of life played without goal lines other than “Thy will be done!” I’m done lap-dogging the topdogs, the wonderdogs, the overdogs, or even the underdogs. I’m done playing according to the rules, whether it’s Robert’s Rule of Order or Miss Manner’s Rules of Etiquette or Martha Stewart’s Rules of Living or Merrill Lynch’s Money-minding/Bottom-lining/Ladder-climbing Rules. I am not here to please the dominant culture or to serve any all-show, no-go bureaucracies. I live to please my Lord and Savior. My spiritual taste buds have graduated from fizz and froth to Fire and Ice. Sometimes I’m called to sharpen the cutting edge, and sometimes to blunt the cutting edge. Don’t give me that old-time religion. Don’t give me that new-time religion. Give me that all-time religion that’s as hard as rock and as soft as snow. I’ve stopped trying to make life work, and started trying to make life sing. I’m finished with secondhand sensations; third-rate dreams, low-risk, high-rise traders; and goose-stepping, flag-waving crusades. I no longer live by and for anything but everything God-breathed, Christ-centered, and Spirit-driven. I can’t be bought by any personalities or perks, positions or prizes. I won’t give up, though I will give in ...to openness of mind, humbleness of heart, and generosity of spirit. When shorthanded and hard-pressed, I will never again hang in there. I will stand in there; I will run in there; I will pray in there, I will sacrifice in there; I will endure in there—in fact I will do everything in there but hang. My face is upward; my feet are forward; my eyes are focused; my way is cloudy; my knees are worn; my heart, burdened; my spirit, light; my road narrow, my mission, wide. I won’t be seduced by popularity, reduced by criticism, travestied by hypocrisy, or trivialized by mediocrity. I am organized religion’s best friend and worst nightmare. I won’t back down, slow down, shut down, or let down until I’m preached out, taught out, headed out, or hauled out of God’s mission in the world entrusted to members of the Church of the Out-of-Control ... to unbind the confined, whether they’re the down trodden or the upscale, the overlooked or the under-represented. My fundamental identity is a disciple of Jesus—but even more, as a disciple of Jesus who lives in Christ, who doesn’t walk through history simply “in His steps,” but seeks to travel more deeply in His Spirit.” And until my last breath and when my spirit leaves my body “you can find me filling, not killing time so that one day God will pick me up in the lineup of the ages as one of God’s own And then ... it will be worth it all ... to hear these words, the most precious words I can ever hear: “Well done, thou good and faithful ... Out of Control Disciple.” These are dangerous times and God needs us to go faithing down the road doing all the good we can as we step away from the impending fire and jump into the cleansing water of our love. God’s love.

This particular quote of Leonard Sweet's has become an anchor for me during these very uncertain times. And provides me with hope for the future, revealing a mission to help fulfill that hope. My mission, to become the very best out-of-control disciple possible! It is our calling.

Keith Green wrote about this in his song, "Stained Glass,"

We are like windows

Stained with colors

Of the rainbow

Set in a darkened room

Til Jesus comes

Comes to shine Thru.

Then the colors fall around our feet

Over those we meet

Rainbow colors of assorted hues

Come exchange our blues

For His love that you see shining

Thru me.

Amen