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Paul's letter to Timothy gives us some of the most memorable and moving lines in all the Bible.

I am already being poured out as a libation, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.

So what is faith, that we should have to run, even fight, to keep it?

Is faith something that we think, or something that we feel, or something that we do? Some say faith is belief, some say it is trust, and some say it is action. I think that each of those answers is true. To imagine faith, picture a triangle. The three points are belief, trust and action. Faith lives at each of those points, and in the lines connecting each point to the other two.

In other words, Christian faith is three-in-one and one-in-three, just like God. Your faith is a reflection of the Holy Trinity. It lives in and between your intellect (belief), your emotions (trust) and your ethical values and commitments (action).

Let's try this. Picture your soul as a high school. If I visited, checked in at the office, and got permission to walk the halls looking for your faith, I might go to the library (your intellect) and find it working on a paper or checking out a book. Or I could see it in the gym (your ethical values and commitments) working up a sweat. If I came back on Saturday night for the homecoming dance, I would find faith stirring your emotions..

From the outside, High School looks like it might be four years of uninterrupted fun. From the inside, as I remember, it wasn't always easy: not in the library, not in the gym, and especially not at dances. I have bad library memories of algebra books, gym memories of getting my shot stuffed regularly by Purcell Smith, and dance memories of my dream girl, Julie Honeycutt, dancing with the other guy. We humans are vulnerable at all the points where faith lives: our thoughts, our values, and especially our emotions.

So how do we fight this good fight, finish this race, and keep the faith? Let's take that question to the library, to the gym, and to the senior prom.

We will start in the library. Libraries are stuffed with books. In a good-sized library you can find books on any subject: history, world religion, evolution . . . there is no end of things to think about and learn. Faith is interested in every single book.

When my father was Bishop, a college student who wanted to be a priest told him he planned to major in religion. My father advised him not to major in religion, but rather in

either in literature or physics. That is because faith is not about religion, it is about the world and life and God.

What we need as human beings is faithful intelligence and intelligent faith. What we too often settle for is faithless intelligence or unreasonable faith. Lately it has seemed that both are on the rise. This is not a healthy situation. Lack of faith actually diminishes intelligence. Defects of reason diminish faith. Faith and reason strengthen, complement, validate each other. In our society today, we Christians must fight the good fight to bring and keep the two together.

Twelve years ago, at the age of 43, I went back to school. (Back to homework, back to books, back to teachers' dirty looks.) I went back wanting to better understand what it means to be both reasonable and faithful. I became especially interested to see how faith in Christ fits with what science, philosophy and history can show us about the world. It took ten long, hard years of effort, but finally I came out the door with a diploma in hand that named me a "Doctor of Theology." I suppose that means I am more or less a board certified teacher of the Christian faith in the Anglican tradition.

What do I teach?

I teach faith's acceptance of Darwinian evolution, because the evidence is there.

I teach to undermine the myth of science-religion warfare. Historically, the idea that Christian faith has chronically opposed itself to science is mostly wrong. This idea that science and religion have been perennially at war is largely a modern invention, traceable to some historians and scientists who frankly had an anti-religious axe to grind. Again, the evidence is there.

I teach that Christian faith is true. I teach its truth not just around the edges, but at the core: in Jesus Christ, God himself was with us, full of grace and truth; for our sins, he died; for our life, God raised him from the dead, victorious. In Christ, we are more than conquerors over sin, and death, and evil. The evidence is there.

The old skeptic H.L. Mencken defined faith as "an illogical belief in the occurrence of the improbable." Give Mencken credit for being clever, but that isn't true. There is more than enough logic in Christianity. Read Thomas Aquinas and you may get more logic than you can swallow. As for probability, the gospel has all the probability faith requires. Our beliefs concerning God and Christ are more than probable enough to bet our lives on, and they are good and beautiful enough to make us want to. This side of heaven, I don't see how we could ask for more.

Let's put down the books and walk on over to the gym—because faith lives not only in our thoughts, but also in our actions. Faith involves an ethical commitment to live by certain values. But which ones? That's the struggle. So many different values compete for our devotion. If you were to look inside my soul, you would see a complicated mix of family loyalties, business responsibilities and church duties, each with its own set of

values asking for my attention and commitment. You would also see the full set of basic instincts and raw ambitions that belong to human nature. I assume you have those too.

One of our jobs as human beings is to fold our basic instincts into activities that are wholesome and socially worthwhile—such as family, business and church. It does not require faith to see the necessity for this. No one wants to live in a world governed only by instinct and ambition. (If you want a glimpse of a world edging in that direction, check out the movie “The Social Network.”) What faith does is raise the bar on our ethical values and commitments. It asks us to fold our civilized and socially wholesome activities like work and family into a yet higher vision of what it means to be a human being. Faith says: “You are made in the image of God. Act like it.” That changes how we do family, church and business.

And then, just when we think we’ve gotten good at that, faith raises the bar again.

In our gospel today, Jesus tells us that we can do just about everything right, up to and including fasting, tithing, and going regularly to church on Sundays, and still get it wrong by feeling morally superior. If that weren’t odd enough, Jesus then indicates that we can get just about everything wrong—lying, stealing, adultery, missing church etc.—and still get it right by opening our hearts to a spirit of remorse and a sincere desire to turn our lives around. Just like that, we are good with God (!).

This is one of the most difficult two-sided teachings of the Christian faith. In taking it to heart, faith has a real struggle on its hands. The goal is to be moral but not self-righteous and judgmental. We fight first to overcome the urge to help ourselves to whatever we think we can away with, then we must struggle against the urge to congratulate ourselves for our success.

That seems almost impossible, until we realize that sinfulness and self-righteousness come from the same place and have the same remedy. The source is the ego. The remedy is love. Love checks the darker angels of our lower nature. Love casts out the darker angels of our moral nature too. In the soul’s gymnasium, what we are working on, inwardly and outwardly, is love.

So the bell rings, school is out, and it is time to go home and get ready for the prom. We are all getting spruced up, slicked down, and ready to put on our dancing shoes. I am both excited and nervous. Does she love me, or does she not? Did I put on too much Hai Karate? Will I try to kiss her at the door?

Faith is not only what we think and do, it is also how we feel. But feelings are excitable and nervous: we are up, we are down, we are in-between.

The feeling we want is happiness. St. Augustine built one of his great theological tomes from the premise that “only a fool doesn’t want to be happy.” But as life goes on, more and more we suffer loss of those people, experiences and things that had been the source

of our moments of happiness and peace. Loss gets us coming and going, as we feel it both by way of anticipation (fear) and memory (grief).

The Holy Spirit's remedy for fear and grief is . . . hope. Hope is not an anesthetic. It does not dispel the pain of fear and grief. It does, however, take something from their power.

“We are afflicted,” Paul writes, “but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed.” (2 Cor 4:8–9)

That is how hope works. It knows the reality and power of loss, but it believes and trusts in a higher, better, stronger reality and power. Higher and stronger than fear. Higher and stronger than grief. Higher and stronger than death.

The H.L. Menckens of the world write off hope as wishful thinking. But our hopes don't rest on wishes—they rest on Jesus Christ.

To him be ascribed all glory, majesty, power and dominion, now and forever, Amen.