

My beliefs have evolved over the years from not believing, to believing, and then questioning the idea of "belief".

My family did not go to church during my growing up years, but we had family ties to several faith traditions. As a teenager, some friends invited me to Young Life, a Christian outreach organization where I learned about Jesus for the first time. Soon after that I started attending a church and within the next year, I decided to become a Christian, was baptized and joined. I had so much to learn and spent a lot of time studying the Bible during my high school years. I'm appreciative of having a faith community during these formative years.

Later in college after a time of disillusionment I started reading Sojourners magazine and learned about other perspectives that expanded my view of God and God's work in the world. After college I met Leslie and we realized early on that we shared similar values and our relationship quickly became serious. After we were married, we wondered if we could find a church that aligned with our values. Some friends from Eastern University in Wayne, recommended that we try Frazer Mennonite Church which was fairly close to where we lived. At Frazer we were welcomed and felt at home right away. We were attracted by an emphasis on community, simplicity, service and peacemaking. For the next 38 years my faith was formed within this context. This was the place where Leslie and I shared life's joys and sorrows, during times of discouragement and times of hope and new beginnings.

It was during one difficult time of questioning, about 10 years ago that I went to hear Karen Armstrong speak in Philadelphia about the Charter for Compassion. She talked about the eccentric emphasis on "belief" in Christianity today as an accident of history that has distorted our understanding of religious truth. Most other traditions prize practice above creedal orthodoxy: many would say religion is something you do, and that you cannot understand the truths of faith unless you are committed to a transformative way of life that takes you beyond the prism of selfishness. I believe in a transformative way to leads from fear and anger to love and action.

And it was also during this time that I heard an interview with the Dalai Lama on NPR. He said something that has stayed with me. He said that sometimes westerners try Buddhism, but it doesn't always work out that well because of vast cultural differences that do not translate well across cultures. He suggests that each person should be the best you can be within your own faith tradition. This challenged me to reassess my spiritual life and rediscover what I believe.

To me, the best part of the Anabaptists / Mennonite faith tradition is an emphasis on a practical living out of one's faith within the context of a community. What I embrace about our faith tradition is doing what Jesus taught and modeled. Jesus' command to love the Lord your God and likewise love your neighbor as yourself, summarizes how we are to live here and now. Following this greatest commandment is difficult if not completely impossible. And yet, I have experienced glimpses of this kind of love, both

on the receiving end and at times as a giver. This kind of love is both a miracle and a mystery and it's why I am here today.

I'll end with some words from one of Wendell Berry's books that expresses how this love happens within community.

"My vision for the gathered church had been replaced by a vision of the gathered community. What I saw now was the community imperfect and irresolute, but held together by the frayed and always fraying, incomplete and yet ever holding bonds of the various sorts of affection And yet, I saw them all as somehow perfected, beyond time, by one another's love, compassion and forgiveness, as it is said we may be perfected by grace."

This is what I believe.

Dave Cattell. 11/24/2019