

Christian Perspectives: That spark in life

By Rev. Penny Lewis

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If someone were to ask you, 'Are you a person of faith?' What would your response be? To live without faith is to live without hope? is to not really live. Does that make sense to you?

When I hear once again the trill of the red winged black bird I have faith that spring is on its way; when I crawl into bed at night I have faith that I will wake up the next morning feeling refreshed. In the midst of winter, I have faith that the stark bare branches of my maple tree will be dressed in a vibrant green come spring and dance in the wind. To live without faith, it seems to me, is to live in darkness.

I have just finished reading *A House in the Sky* by Amanda Lindhout.

It is the true story of a woman in her mid-twenties who has a tremendous yearn for adventure. She sets out to travel the world as a freelance journalist. She is prepared to go into some of the very troubled parts of the world with a faith in her own invincibility.

Eventually, she decides to travel in Somalia despite many warnings that the country is very dangerous, that Westerners are being kidnapped and held in deplorable conditions for exorbitant ransom. Despite this, she continues her travels into Somalia and she and her travel partner are kidnapped. They are held in captivity for over a year and a half. She experiences isolation, terrible physical and sexual abuse, starvation, lives in filthy conditions etc. etc. Yet, despite this, she keeps her faith that some time she will be free and will go on living.

Then, one day after a terrible round of torture, Amanda loses her faith to go on.

She said to herself she cannot stand the pain any longer and she plans to kill herself. She will do it at dawn the next day before her captors come into her space. That night, she brings to her memory all those who have loved her, sends them messages of warmth and comfort from her mind and says her goodbyes.

Just at the very first crack of dawn something extraordinary happened. A bird comes into her room, her prison. She had not seen any birds since her capture, she had no idea how it got there. The bird walks around the room, they look at each other, eye to eye and then the bird flies away.

It was within this encounter that her faith returned. She said that she had faith in signs and that the bird was a sign for her. She would find a way to withstand what is happening to her and she regains her faith to go on living.

Amanda never speaks about any formal religious faith and yet within her very being was a very deep faith, a faith to live.

It would seem to me that if we believe we are made in the image of God there is a God Spark within all of human kind. The challenge is to find ways to stay connected to that Spark enabling, in some mysterious way, for that Spark to shine forth in our lives. For Amanda it was almost extinguished.

Paul, in his writings, is always preaching to his new converts to live a life in the faith of Jesus Christ.

To me, that is a bit of a throwaway line unless it is unpacked. What does it mean to live a life in the faith of Jesus Christ? For me, the image that comes to mind is the image of love. I am reminded of a chant, 'A new commandment I give unto you other than you

love one and others as I have loved you. By this all shall know you are my disciples if you have love for one and another.?

Jesus reached out and loved the unloveable, the unclean. He said to the sinner who came and washed his feet with her tears, dried them with her hair and anointed them with costly oil, 'Your sins are forgiven, go in peace.'

Somehow, she who is without a name, only known as a sinner, had faith that Jesus could see beyond how she had lived her life and see the God Spark deep within her as he said to 'Your sins are forgiven, go in peace.'

Amanda kept saying to her travel companion 'I love you' when they could occasionally make contact. Even when he betrayed her, her message to him was one of love.

Another theme for living a life in the faith of Jesus Christ is found in the Easter Story, where we hear about life after death. Amanda was brought to renewed faith through the gift of the presence of a bird. Faith come to me that spring is coming in the trill of the red winged black bird. Can you ask yourself: from where comes my faith?

May we all find ways to nurture our faith, that Spark in life, faith in ourselves and beyond.