

## **The Maturation of Christian Belief**

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The pressures of professional life often crowd out time for introspection, so the invitation to address, "What do you believe?" is a welcome change of pace. In preparing to reply, however, it is clear that there is no simple answer to this question. As a Christian I can, of course, turn to creeds and confessions, and as a Lutheran I can reference the writings of Luther and the volumes theologians have written on grace. But what I believe cannot be explain by such alone.

My understanding of belief came early in life, and I remember the exact moment it came. I was nine at the time. It was Lent. My father was a pastor, and Wednesday night services were required. I was sick, however, and had to stay home. My Father turned on the radio so I could listen to a service being broadcast from Minneapolis. As I listened to the service I felt a call, although at that age I did not call it such. If I were to accept the gift of Jesus' love, I would have to walk a special path. It was a path that went into the world to help all the needs that could be found.

Of course, at the time I did not understand either the path or the needs that were to be found. Somehow my belief told me that I would be equipped and would be led. As this concept of mission took on more flesh and matured, I came to realize that just as belief required action, so too was the action a witness to the original motivating belief.

My time at St. Olaf provided me not only new concepts on which to build my faith into a belief-system but also to use as I ventured forth on the as yet uncertain path. During my time there I also came to realize that I was already walking on the path. I came to better understand the power of the "Spirit" to lead me and teach me. Each encounter with the "Spirit" left me strengthened, yet humbled. I learned to give up more of my pre-determined self.

Walking into the real world required making choices. The tools gathered at St. Olaf and graduate school helped make choices. I continued journeying down the path, learning that the end seemed no nearer or perhaps understanding that the end point kept extending.

The power of the journey has been intoxicating. My belief still demands going forth and relying on the power of the "Spirit" to guide me. I have come to know that there may be no end to the journey or that others may have to finish it for me. My definition of the needs of others has expanded, and I have had to accept that not all of those needs can or may be met. Most centrally, my belief knows that Jesus still is walking with me just as he did that Lenten night so long ago.