



2000

Faith

Mark Zimmerman

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Faith

⌘ Mark Zimmerman

I remember one night my Mom was crying. She had just found out that her sister—my Aunt—would be bound to a wheelchair for the rest of her life. That’s why my Mom was crying. I, however, did not cry.

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For my 18th birthday I got my friends and me tickets to the “once-in-a-lifetime” Picasso exhibit down in Washington. None of us knew very much or cared very much about art. But it was supposed to be once in a lifetime, so we went.

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My Mom and brother and I went out to visit my Aunt after we found out about her confinement to a wheelchair. My Mom is a Christian and she wanted my Aunt to become a Christian so my Aunt would go to heaven instead of to hell. My Mom therefore wanted to talk to my Aunt alone, and so she dropped my brother and me off at a shopping center. I prayed a couple little prayers for my Mom as my brother and I looked around inside a bookstore. It was at that bookstore that I purchased my copy of the book *Relativity*, by Albert Einstein.

When my Mom picked my brother and me up, she was crying. My Aunt couldn’t believe that my Mom thought she was going to hell, when this life, for my Aunt, is hell. I told my Mom I was sorry—and I was.

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I had also gotten my friends and me tickets to the Holocaust museum for the day of the Picasso exhibit. We went there before we went to the Picasso exhibit. At the Holocaust museum they had this short movie that told about how Christians had persecuted and murdered Jews during the last 2000 years.

Near the end of the path you follow through the Holocaust

museum there is a hall where they have thousands of shoes that people who were murdered in the concentration camps wore. The shoes, I remember, all looked the same. The shoes *meant* people, like the headlights of oncoming traffic do, and like the red and yellow lights of jetliners flying overhead at night do. My friends and I soon left the Holocaust museum and went to wait in line at the once-in-a-lifetime Picasso exhibit. Waiting in line *means* people, too—and so does a painting.

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A few years before my Aunt became bound to a wheelchair, her son won sixteen million dollars in the lottery. He bought his parents—my Aunt and Uncle—a specially-made house with wide doors and hallways so that my Aunt could move around easily. At that time she could still use a walker, but sometimes she used a wheelchair if she got tired. Now, of course, she only uses a wheelchair.

My Aunt is actually fifteen or sixteen years older than my Mom—it's just the way things worked out. So my Mom and Aunt were never extremely close, or at least not as close as some siblings. Compared with the rest of my Mom's extended family, though, the two of them get along exceptionally well.

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The Picasso exhibit was nice. The people were nice. The paintings were nice. Honestly, though, I didn't understand a thing, even though whenever I would speak of the exhibit subsequently I would act as if I understood it all perfectly. I didn't understand, specifically, how one of those paintings could be worth more than everything my family owns. I also didn't understand what would happen to me if I damaged one of those paintings. I mean, in the paper they would write it up as "*some* idiot destroyed *the* priceless portrait of Gertrude Stein." I guess paintings do last longer than people—their respective existences, therefore, are in one way more substantial ours. But it evens out in the end, I suppose, considering the fact that paintings don't exactly have much hope for personal growth—or heaven, for that matter.

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My Aunt has arthritis and osteoporosis. Her bones are extremely fragile and painful and twisted. She's a wonderful, beautiful person—very engaging—and in a straightjacket of a body.

I remember visiting her one time in her hospital room in Dayton, where she was recovering from surgery. They had operated on her to lengthen one of her legs that had become twisted and shortened from arthritis. I remember the smell of the room, and I remember looking out the window at the buildings and down at the parking lot and thinking how it wouldn't work just to put her in the car with us and go.

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After the Picasso exhibit my friends wanted to go over to the Air and Space museum. It was very blue in there and very crowded. We went up to the second floor and I remember we stood outside a gift shop. I remember that I was facing West on the walkway. Then I turned around to the East and through the window I saw the Capitol. I turned back around to the West again and saw four or five people in orange robes coming towards me. They were Buddhist monks. I purposefully made no attempt to get out of their way. As they passed toward the East, the orange robe of the one walking nearest to me brushed against my arm.

These Buddhist monks were wearing robes just like Jesus would have, 2000 years ago, in a place full of rockets and spaceships. I had a certain reverence for these men for some reason—maybe because I am by temperament a religious person. Maybe because I thought they didn't have any of the problems I had. Or maybe it was because they were clearly identifiable in the way that they wanted to be identified, and were not ashamed. Or maybe it was because I thought they had peace. (Or maybe I just like the color orange.)

After they passed, I turned to the South and went into the gift shop and I remember looking at a poster of Albert Einstein. Albert Einstein, of course, would later be named the Person of the Century, just beating out Gandhi (who wore a robe, too). All things, if I understand what Einstein *meant*, are relative.

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In my freshman year at college I became very cynical towards God. (When you think about it, doesn't Christianity seem awfully cynical, how it says that all people are intrinsically evil?) I was cynical towards God and I justified this by thinking about how my Aunt shouldn't be punished for her unbelief because she had been hurt so much. I thought that she was entirely justified in her unbelief. How very easy for God, I thought, to arbitrarily bless and curse people, when He has heaven regardless.

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In February of 2000 my Mom explained faith in Jesus to my Aunt once again. This time, my Aunt believed. In Jesus. Who wore a robe 2000 years ago that would heal you if you even just brushed against it with your arm. I always say that God gave my Aunt faith. God gave me faith, too—renewing it for me.

If Jesus were alive now, of course, and here on earth, my cousin could use his money to get my Aunt to Jesus so that Jesus could heal her and make her walk again—even if His robe just brushed against her. My cousin would probably spend all his money to fly her or drive her to wherever Jesus was. And Jesus would heal her, even if she just brushed up against His robe, like I brushed against the robe of that Buddhist monk, whose name I'll never know.

Where is Jesus now, when we still need Him? He's up in heaven, they say, with His robe. How can we get to Him, even just to brush against His robe? It's impossible—except, perhaps, through faith.