Belief <-> Faith

My ‘thoughts’ for last week were on the subject of faith; I thought I might follow up with some (personal) thoughts about belief… specifically, are they much the same thing, and interdependent? Or is there ‘a difference’.

This instalment comes with a ‘health warning’ - I have heard cogent arguments that are contrary to this homily; so I’m certainly not trying to define (in a ‘definitive way’) what’s-what…I’m hoping to encourage readers to review for themselves where they ‘stand’ (if that’s the right word).

A few years ago, I realised that we might, indeed, tend to use the words faith and belief “interchangeably”, more often than not in a single phrase. But I’ve come to realise that faith and belief have very distinct meanings, and it took me a while, over many months, to think it through…

Belief: The essence of belief is an acceptance that something or someone exists, or that something is true; belief (in this sense) happens in spite of there being no concrete proof, or even in the face of proof to the contrary.

Faith: The essence of faith, however, is more about absolute trust and loyalty that requires commitment, and action, even in the absence of of complete certainty. You may remember a quote from last week’s “thoughts’: ‘Faith is the substance off things hoped for; the evidence of things not seen”.

So faith is often based on one’s own experience and intuition, and by believing/learning from the perceived wisdom of others.

Arguably, it’s possible to believe in something, or someone, without having any particular faith in them (for example, there are many who would freely recognise Jesus as an historical figure, but fewer who would believe Him to be divine!).

But I find it difficult to offer any examples of how I could have faith in something or someone without believing in their existence. Maybe one example: I guess most people believe medical advice about the benefits of eating healthy food… but fewer (myself included, sometimes) don't necessarily have the faith to follow that advice; in other words, we don't necessarily allow even facts to actually change our lifestyle….

Thought for the Week: I'd invite you to consider this as a premise: that faith clearly involves belief, but it doesn't necessarily require an initial desire to believe. In other words, faith can be a choice, based on a decision to trust someone, or something you believe in. Then each 'fuels' the other…

Christians, of course, believe that Jesus is The Way, The Truth, and The Life - even in the absence of 'hard evidence',but relying on the experiences and wisdom of those who were there at the time, and those who followed them. As a result, we're encouraged 'believe in God', to trust and follow Jesus' example and to live our faith: that involves faith/trust, and rising to the challenges of our calling to discipleship.

Whilst separate and distinct by definition, faith and belief (in the Christian context) are interwoven, and both are required for 'effective discipleship'.

Hebrews 11:6 ***And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.***