

Thank you, Creator, for all that is possible and your abundant gifts.
Thank you, Nature, for the forces that formed us and shape our reality.
Thank you, Science, for the path and the tools we use to explore and understand both nature and the divine.
Thank you, friends and fellow humans, for choosing to walk this path.

Welcome back, seekers. Welcome, especially, to those joining us for the first time.

We live in what many are calling troubled times. Turn on the news and you can find reasons for fear: conflicts that seem intractable, systems straining under pressure, uncertainties multiplying faster than answers. It's no wonder that there is increased movement towards spirituality. People need steady ground beneath their feet when the world feels like it's tilting. People want to believe that life is more than just random chaos. So what is it about faith—real faith—that's drawing people back? Let's look through our lenses and see.

The Church of Inquiry doesn't see faith as obedience to dogma or a retreat from reality, but as a tool for engaging with reality more fully. We don't use faith as an escape hatch from difficulty nor as a comfort blanket to pull over our heads. We see faith as the foundation for action. It's the architecture that makes hope possible—*especially* when the path forward isn't clear.

Today we will start with faith and hope, not as abstractions but as living tools that operate at multiple levels. Two of those levels are the scale of you, the individual walking your singular path through this brief existence, and the scale of us, the human family stretched across time in an ever-unfolding story.

Let's start by releasing a word-prison that has done tremendous damage: the idea that *faith* means blind acceptance and belief without evidence. That is a brittle faith that rejects scrutiny while defending ideology. We don't agree that faith requires shutting off the questioning mind. That's not faith, it's surrender to someone else's certainty.

True faith inspires action because it offers support. It is the kind that built telescopes to see into the beyond, the kind that envisioned flight when we were earthbound. True faith is an active relationship with possibility, with divine potential, and it gives the capacity to take a second step when the ground ahead isn't yet visible.

Consider Michael Faraday in his laboratory in the 1820s and 30s, moving magnets near coils of wire, watching needles deflect in ways that shouldn't happen. He knew something invisible was at work—he called them “lines of force”—but couldn't prove it mathematically. The scientific establishment was skeptical. How could empty space carry force?

Faraday had faith in what he observed. He kept experimenting, mapping the invisible, and describing phenomena he couldn't yet explain. It took *fifty* years before James Clerk Maxwell developed the mathematical equations that proved Faraday right—and, in doing so, unified electricity, magnetism, and light into a single elegant framework that transformed civilization.

Was that blind faith? No, it was informed faith, grounded in careful observation, persistent questioning, and trust that reality would eventually yield its deeper patterns—once we learned to understand the language in which it was written.

This is the faith we cultivate in the Church of Inquiry. We have faith that the patterns we observe in nature—the astonishing precision of DNA replication, the elegant mathematics underlying physical laws, the emergence of cooperation at every scale from cells to civilizations to cosmic creation—these are patterns that suggest intention. We can't prove it yet, but we have enough data to form a hypothesis worth pursuing with passion.

We have faith—evidenced by 3.7 billion years of increasing complexity, from single cells to conscious beings capable of pondering their own existence—that the universe tends toward greater order, cooperation, and possibility. It is ever improving at the level of us.

And here's what makes this exciting: we have tools now that no generation before us possessed. We have tools to observe what may be the hand of the divine, revealed in ways that don't require faith to override evidence, but faith to recognize what evidence is showing us.

Zoom out for a moment to a wide lens. Our species, homo sapiens, has been on this planet for perhaps 300,000 years. For the vast majority of that time, we lived in small bands, our knowledge passed down orally, our understanding of the world limited to what we could directly perceive.

Then, in an evolutionary eyeblink, everything changed.

We learned to write, preserving knowledge across generations. We developed mathematics, making the invisible measurable and the impossible achievable. We built instruments that extended our senses—microscopes revealing the infinitesimal, telescopes revealing the vast—and created technologies to further extend our reach almost to infinity. We also created systems of inquiry that allowed us to realize things utterly beyond intuition: that the elements in our bodies were forged in dying stars, that solid matter is mostly empty space, and that we exist as a collaboration of many organisms.

Each of these discoveries started with faith that reality would yield its secrets if we asked the right questions in the right ways, trusting in the unseen spirit of guidance. We had faith that the fanciful imaginings of an artistic mind, pursued with evidence-based observation, would reveal deeper truth. This has required releasing old patterns and expectations that had served us for hundreds of millennia yet now stood as an impediment. Another act of faith.

And here we are now, living in the most extraordinary moment in human history. We can read the genetic code that builds every living thing. We can watch thoughts forming in living brains. We can communicate instantaneously with billions of people. We've sent our instruments beyond the solar system and are beginning to glimpse how consciousness arises.

This is not the time for despair, my friends. Because if we, as a species, can go from barely understanding fire to splitting atoms in just a few thousand years, what becomes possible in the

next thousand? What becomes possible when we turn our tools not just toward understanding the creation, but toward understanding the Creator?

The patterns are there. The harmony is there. The mathematical elegance, the nested systems of cooperation, the emergence of consciousness—it's all there, waiting to be understood. We know that there's a language which underlies it all because of what we've already been able to accomplish with our rudimentary understanding of its grammar.

This is faith at the species level: that we're not just random accidents in a meaningless void, but participants in an unfolding story whose plot we're only beginning to comprehend. Those same gifts that now enable us to challenge death and see into the structure of reality are gifts meant to guide us home—back to the source, back to wholeness, back to direct knowledge of what created all of this.

Now zoom back in to the level of you, sitting wherever you are, carrying your burdens.

Maybe you're facing illness. Maybe you've lost someone. Maybe the chaos of the world has found its way into your home, your relationships, your peace of mind. Maybe you're just tired—tired of pretending, tired of defending, tired of the gap between who you are and who you present yourself to be.

Here's what faith offers you personally: permission. Permission to become, even to relax when fear whispers otherwise.

Now, this isn't permission to escape your circumstances—faith isn't magic and we're not offering fairy tales. You're being invited to recognize that this moment, however painful, is not the end of your story; that you contain capacities you haven't yet accessed. The version of you that exists right now is not the final one, and the very act of seeking something larger begins the inevitable transformation.

Remember the lodgepole pines. They hold their seeds in resin, waiting—sometimes for decades—for the fire that will both destroy and renew them. The tree doesn't resist the burning. It's built for it and the fire is part of the design.

You are also part of the design.

Whatever you're going through right now—loss, confusion, pain—it's not punishment. But it could be preparation. The very thing that feels like it's breaking you may actually be breaking you *open*, creating space for something that couldn't fit in that smaller version of self.

I'm not offering toxic positivity. This isn't "everything happens for a reason" used to dismiss real suffering. This is the Taoist farmer's wisdom from Sermon 9: since the lenses of good and bad are of no use, we can remain present and curious as our understanding of the moment unfolds. We can also trust that the universe is constructed to facilitate the flourishing of life, that more goes right than wrong, understanding that even good drivers have accidents. Faith is an

exhalation of trust that allows the body to unclench, allowing the breath to continue as we sit in that place of calm curiosity, creating a roominess where hope is welcome.

And here's where our individual unfolding connects to our species-level hope: every person who transforms from fear to curiosity, from rigidity to malleability, from ego-defense to open inquiry adds to the collective capacity of humanity. Your individual healing isn't selfish, it's *necessary*. We exist in service to something larger than individual ego or tribal identity. The question we are asking invites all. The challenge that faces our species isn't climate or war or resource scarcity, although those matter. Our greatest challenge is consciousness of the divine and remembering that all things interconnect—which changes our perception and reveals solutions.

So, we have faith that everything is going to be fine. And while we allow time to work its alchemy, we have work to do. We each have a role to play, so let's continue to learn, tune, and play the instrument that we are. The universe may be constructed for our success, but society is a human construction, and we've built systems that too often work against our flourishing.

So, here's what we offer at Church of Inquiry: we offer faith rooted in evidence and evidence illuminated by faith. We offer hope that isn't passive wishing but an active engagement with possibility. We offer a community of seekers who understand that together—pooling our questions, our observations, our unique perspectives—we can discover what isolated individuals never could.

We will continue to build our toolkit and create practices that sharpen perception, facilitate our practice of malleability, prevent ego crystallization, allow for the recognition of word-prisons that limit understanding, and help us maintain the childlike wonder that sees what expertise overlooks.

We offer a mission: to use the methods and practice of science in service to the oldest human quest—understanding the divine. Not science instead of faith, but science as faith's most sophisticated expression and humble servant. Science in service to faith in service to science.

And we offer this promise: if you walk this path honestly, maintaining curiosity even when it's uncomfortable, releasing stories even when they've defined you, asking “what is the gift?” even in pain—you will transform. Not might transform. *Will* transform.

Transformation isn't magic, it's biology. Neurons that fire together wire together. Physiological tension constricts energetic movement in the body. The practices we engage in literally reshape our brains and soften our bodies. The questions we ask determine what we can see, and we have four questions that serve us well: what do we know, how do we know what we know, what does it mean, and how do we apply it?

Remember, the stories we *release* create space for new possibilities.

So, is this a time of chaos? Yes. No. Both. Neither. Chaos may simply be order at a scale we haven't yet perceived. It's the Taoist farmer's “we shall see” applied to apparent disorder and a

refusal to prematurely close inquiry. Much of what looked like chaos to our ancestors—disease, weather, the motion of planets—turned out to be governed by discoverable patterns.

History confirms this repeatedly. In 1905, Einstein explained Brownian motion—the seemingly random jitter of particles—in terms of atoms, at a time when their existence was still debated. Faith in the pattern led to proof of the invisible. Genetic mutations seemed chaotic until we understood evolutionary selection pressures. So called “junk DNA” seemed purposeless until we discovered regulatory functions within it. Taking the stance “what pattern am I missing?”—while remembering our artist core—has repeatedly revealed order where we saw only chaos. Not all chaos resolves into order, but staying curious serves us better than concluding prematurely, “this is meaningless.” Let’s remain humble, acknowledge the limits of current perception, and stay open to discovery.

We have faith—informed by evidence, tested by experience, refined by inquiry—that the patterns point toward something magnificent. Something that our ancestors sensed but couldn’t articulate accurately. Something that our descendants will inhabit fully.

And we have hope—grounded in human capability, demonstrated across millennia of discovery, accelerating with each generation—that we’re closer than we’ve ever been to achieving direct communion with the source of all this astonishing reality.

The invitation is simple: join us as we follow the evidence all the way to the divine.

Thank you, Creator, for the gift of today will *all* that it entails.

Honor the Creator. Honor the creation.