

Landry: Trust like a friend who won't let you fall while walking the tightrope

Charles Blondin is one of history's most famous tightrope walkers, having crossed Niagara Falls on a tightrope three hundred times between 1859-1896.

Part of the attraction was that The Great Blondin often sought ways to make his crossings more novel (and dangerous). These included pushing a wheelbarrow, at night with locomotive lights illuminating the rope, doing summersaults and backflips, wearing buckets for shoes, and one occasion carrying a stove and utensils on his back (which he later used to cook an omelet).

It seems that his most dramatic crossing took place when Blondin carried his manager, Harry Colcord, on his back. Colcord only agreed to this crossing when no one else was willing to go. In spite of the fact that the crowd was filled with people who believed The Great Blondin was capable of this feat – they'd repeatedly seen him do far more dangerous stunts – but no one was willing to put their lives into his hands except his manager.

The obvious question here is why was Colcord willing to step up where so many others weren't? And the answer should be equally apparent. For Harry Colcord, Charles Blondin was more than a showman. Colcord knew Blondin as a friend and a colleague and understood the care with which he undertook all his stunts. It was far easier for him to trust his life to a friend than to a famous showman, and in the end, Colcord rode on Charles Blondin's back across Niagara Falls three times during those years.

When I look back on my own life, I'd say that I started off like the crowds. My family went to church most Sundays, and I became an altar server. I went to a Catholic school and celebrated my sacraments at the appropriate ages.

I knew many of the stories, had the sense of which moments at Mass I was expected to sit, to stand, and to kneel, and I even had an idea that when things were going badly one should probably pray.

All of this left me with a sense that not only was God capable of great things, He had actually done these things in the lives of others. If I had thought it through, I might have been able to recognize that Abraham's willingness to follow wherever God lead (beginning in Genesis 12) and Mary's total act of self-surrender (Luke 1:38) both represented a choice in which they, like Harry Colcord, put their lives in the hands of another ... in this case, the living God.

But personally, I would never have been the one willing to put my life in the

hands of God. Like those who found excuses not to follow Jesus (Luke 9:57-62) and the rich young man (Mark 10:17-31) who was too afraid to give up the security of his wealth, I would never have been the one to make the great decision to trust God.

This changed during my teenage years thanks to the investment my parish made in intentional youth ministry and my experiences at Camp St. Louis. The net result of these experiences was that Jesus “came off the page” for me and became much more than a character in a story; He became my dearest friend. Since then, I’ve tried to do what Harry Colcord did a century and a half ago – I’ve sought to trust my whole life to my dear friend. If I’m perfectly honest though, it’s a work in progress, and a relationship I seek to deepen each and every day.

When it comes to our relationship with God, we have the opportunity to be like the crowds, believing Him to be capable of great things or to be like Harry Colcord, trusting our very selves to His care. The difference between the two is greater than one might think: it is the difference between a faith that is confident and a faith that may seem to be more like wishful thinking.

When we profess that we “believe in God,” we aren’t saying that we hope there might be a God out there ... we are saying that we are certain that there is a God who exists and who cares for us. The YouCat – the youth catechism of the Catholic Church – makes a beautiful distinction here:

“The word “believe”, however, has two completely different meanings. If a parachutist asks the clerk at the airport, ‘Is the parachute packed safely?’ and the other man answers casually, ‘Hmm, I believe so’, then that will not be enough for him; he would like to know it for sure. But if he has asked a friend to pack the parachute, then the friend will answer the same question by saying, ‘Yes, I did it personally. You can trust me!’ And to that the parachutist will reply, ‘Yes, I believe you.’ This belief is much more than knowing; it means assurance.” –**YouCat 21**

Whether we speak of a parachutist, Harry Colcord over Niagara Falls, or our sure belief in God, the key in each case comes down to one simple thing: the intimacy of a relationship. Our faith in God grows towards assurance the more that we each draw nearer to Him and we allow Him to “come off the page” for us.

“Let your religion be less of a theory and more of a love affair.”

– **G.K. Chesterton**

“What we believe is important, but even more important is the One in whom we believe.”

– **Pope Benedict XVI**

– *Mike Landry is the chaplain for Evergreen Catholic Schools. He is based in Spruce Grove, Alberta.*