SPIRITUAL AND RELIGIOUS DEFINITIONS
(Loosely adapted from conversations with Fr. Steve Wilson)

Belief and trust and faith are all the same word in Greek--pistis (verb form pistefo), which is basically a form of reliability or reliance on something.

Faith is trusting--not understanding.
A child trusts that loving parents are doing the best they know how, even if the whole thing feels is unfair. Faith is acting like the person, institution or item in question can be relied on to be there, and to be consistent, no matter what. I have faith in oxygen, and gravity, and the Free Market, and Democracy--even though I don't necessarily understand them, and even though there are times when I would have made the rules different if I had been in charge. When we say "we believe," in the Creeds, we're saying that, as a family, we trust that this is a dependable set of statements, not a set of statements that we understand completely and for which no other explanation might be possible.

Believe means to live like you trust something.
People seem to believe in the power of love--even though all the evidence inclines to agree that, rationally, love is mostly a short lived chemical process in the brain. Believe is NOT the same thing as understand--think about the things we trust in our lives. Do we understand any of them?

Grace: The kind of gift God gives us--the perfect gift from someone who knows us better than we know ourselves! Grace isn't earned, and it may not be what we put on the list of what we want, but it is always wonderful. Grace can be spiritual peace, or strength, or patience--or it can be meeting the perfect someone when you're not looking for a relationship or a mentor or a colleague. It might be a moment of profound insight, or a period of respite from pain. Grace, in short, is simply and completely God giving us gifts not because it's Christmas or our birthday, but just because He delights in delighting us.

Grace is Latin for "gift," which sums it up beautifully.

LOVE – Five different ways to use one word
Storge=affection, the kind of "love" you feel for people you're around a lot, with whom you have common history (like your family, or circle of acquaintances, or town, or alma mater). It makes all the following possible--but it can turn into exclusivity and "I love the people who are like me."
Thelema=intent, the kind of "love" you feel for things that help you work toward your goals, like co-workers or classmates or teammates who are all on the same page. It helps keep us moving forward and progressing, but it can turn into simply using people for "what's in it for me."
Eros=the feeling of being in love, or romance, or sexual attraction. It has its obvious uses, but it can easily keep us from seeing the deeper value in people, and has a nasty tendency to confuse us into thinking that love is an emotion, which can come and go without our control.
Phileia=profound friendship, the kind of love you feel for your best friends or for your country, with which you share deep and profound agreement on the way the world ought to work. It is a noble thing, which keeps us focused on the best and brightest parts of our human nature--but it can easily turn into thinking that anyone or anything which doesn't share those values has no value at all. Where storge can be exclusive, phileia can be positively ruthless when it grows twisted.
Agape=love as commitment, love because I love. It has no preconditions. But it doesn't mean feeling a particular way (that's eros), or agreeing (that's phileia), or helping others achieve their goals if you disagree with them (that's thelema), or being comfortable being around them if they aren't healthy for you (storge). It means that you always will do the best for the person that you know, and will never stop working, praying and sacrificing for that good. It's "tough love" or sacrificial love.
All five go together to make a fulfilling relationship. Any one by themselves is simply unfulfilling. Generally, though, the Bible uses agape as the kind of love God has for us, and the kind we are urged to have for one another--because it is the one which requires the most work from us. The others come naturally, more or less--agape takes a commitment, and a lot of work.

**Peace** – Things are as they are supposed to be. We are where we’re supposed to be.

**Piety** – **Piety is what you do to make your religion real, visible.**

**Salvation does not mean going to heaven.**
It means being lifted out of something beyond our control. A savior can be the person who helps us into the life boat, or the one who cuts us out of the wreckage of our car. Jesus as a savior certainly has some things to say about eternity--but he has a whole lot more to say about this life. If he's our savior, then he is, in large measure, lifting us out of the broken and toxic world we find ourselves in, a world of addictions, of lies, of revenge, of anger, of self-centeredness. So, regardless of the heaven question (which is a part, but ONLY a part, of the Christian message), if Jesus is my savior, he is changing my life from the things that are poisoning it.

Salvation in Greek is soteria--and it's a word technically used for a conquering king who, among other things, choses to name the conquered city after himself and offers its citizens a municipal charter rather than tearing it to the ground and killing its citizens. Jesus offers us soteria--he has the power to wipe us away, but instead choses to bring us into his camp, name us after himself, lift us up from doom, and give us new lives.

**Satan:** The little voice that whispers in our ear, "It will work out different for you than it does for everyone else...the rules don't apply to you." You know, like when a married man convinces himself that an affair is okay because "I have never felt so much in love," or when a teenager decides that she won't become an addict even though heroin seems not to spare anyone else.

Satan is Hebrew for "tempter," and it's no good worrying about the power of temptation. The only power temptation has is the power we give it by giving in! If we don't listen to that little whisper in our soul's ear, it has no more power than a puff of wind--if we do listen, it will crawl into every room in our soul's house that it can and make a horrible mess. Satan, temptation, is the roommate from hell--literally! All we have to do is refuse to let it/him in the first place ("resist Satan and he will flee from you"), or change the locks (repent).