

Faith Talk

King of Glory Lutheran Church
Pastor Ruth Ann Loughry
October 1-2, 2022

Year C: 20th Sunday after Pentecost: Luke 17:5-10

⁵The apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our faith!” ⁶The Lord replied, “If you had faith the size of a mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and it would obey you.

⁷“Who among you would say to your slave who has just come in from plowing or tending sheep in the field, ‘Come here at once and take your place at the table’? ⁸Would you not rather say to him, ‘Prepare supper for me, put on your apron and serve me while I eat and drink; later you may eat and drink’? ⁹Do you thank the slave for doing what was commanded? ¹⁰So you also, when you have done all that you were ordered to do, say, ‘We are worthless slaves; we have done only what we ought to have done!’ ”

Jesus teaches about faith. He says we already have what we need. We only need faith the size of a mustard seed.

God’s grace and strength and power be with us today.

Let’s spend a few minutes talking about faith; what faith is and what faith isn’t.

Because according to the character Abby on NCIS New Orleans, she says, “Things work out the way they are supposed to. If you just have a little faith!”

Actor Denzel Washington says, “My faith helps me understand circumstances don’t dictate my happiness, my inner peace.”

In our text, Jesus had been handing out some stiff requirements for being a disciple in the verses just prior to what I read. “Even if a person sins against you seven times a day, you must forgive them seven times a day.”

It’s no wonder they say, “Increase our faith!”

The Lord replied, “If you had faith the size of a mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and it would obey you.”

We've heard this verse before and we know how tiny a mustard seed is. But really, what on earth is Jesus talking about? Why would anyone want to plant a tree in the ocean?

At first glance, it seems the disciples think that faith is something one can quantify. It is like water in a glass and they simply want more of it.

Standing in a hospital rooms, I've heard patients over the years say the same thing. "I just don't have enough faith."

When we think about faith as a quantity, we focus is misplaced. If we, you and I don't have enough faith, then faith becomes something we have to produce. Going back to the water in a glass, we must somehow, magically get more of that faith substance and put it into that glass. Or into our spirits as it were.

It's no wonder we think that way. Everything else in our lives comes in quantities. Cold cuts at the deli counter. Clothes in our closets. But faith isn't a quantity. We don't have more or less of this thing called faith.

What we do have is trust in God. That's one definition of faith. Trust in God.

Again, that trust is not manufactured by ourselves. Our ability to trust in God is given to us through the Holy Spirit. Everything about our faith comes from God, is about God, and is given by God.

We trust in this God. Faith is trusting in this incredible God who is faithful. We remember that Jesus was faithful. He took care of people's smallest needs. From doing that, people learned, Jesus was trustworthy. We can trust – have faith in – a trustworthy God.

Yet then, Jesus goes on to tell this short parable about a master and a slave. He reminds the disciples that a master wouldn't invite the slave to come to the table and eat together. No, the master would tell the slave – after coming in from a long days work – to go into the kitchen and cook the meal. And...slaves don't get thanked.

The shock in the parable comes when Jesus turns the disciples – you and me – into the slaves who are just supposed to do their work, without being thanked. "We are worthless slaves; we have done only what we ought to have done!" "

What are the things we don't get thanked for? How about doing things we don't want to be thanked for?

'Take parenting, it's the hardest and most rewarding job in the world. One woman who had a child and then twins not even a year afterwards said she'd like to quit, but never found a place to turn in her resignation.'

(<https://revgalblogpals.org/2019/10/01/revised-common-lectionary-masters-mustard-seeds/>)

Faith is also simply showing up to do what needs to be done whether we get thanked or not. God gives us plenty of opportunities to simply show up. Being faithful doesn't have to be heroic. It only takes a tiny amount, like a mustard seed, to show up and do what we're called to do, in order to be faithful. In order to do, actually amazing things!

Wash the kids' clothes. Finish the project for the boss. Babysit the grandchildren. Help my spouse, then hug them. Make a meal for our friends. We do what God calls us to do in that moment.

Think about all the collective godly actions we've done this week. We were kind. Patient. We prayed and listened. We followed through on our word. Our actions showed the light of Christ.

Now what if we extracted all of those actions, taking them away somehow. The world wouldn't be as grace filled a place. Mother Teresa said, "Be faithful in small things, for it is in them, your strength lies." Confucius said it differently. "The man who moves mountains begins by carrying away small stones."

Finally, faith is a muscle. The more we use it, the stronger it gets. Remember learning how to ride a bike? It took practice to keep our balance and not wobble all over the street. It took practice to ride a short distance and then a longer distance. Faith is like that.

For faith is known and felt through lived experience, trusting God in one challenge. Then through another challenge. Faith is walking into the future, one step at a time, not knowing where we go, yet knowing God goes with us.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. exemplified this when he described the fear that overcame him when he began receiving death threats during the Montgomery bus boycott in the mid-1950s. One night after a particularly troubling phone call, King

found himself exasperated, unable to sleep, and ready to quit. While offering a humble, desperate prayer, King says that he felt the presence of God like never before and heard the words speaking to him in the depth of his soul, “Stand up for righteousness, stand up for truth. God will be at your side forever.” As King notes, “the outer situation remained the same, but God had given me inner calm.” (1. Working Preacher, Francisco J. Garcia. Ph.D. Candidate in Theological Studies, Ethics and Action. Vanderbilt University Divinity School, Nashville, TN. (<https://www.workingpreacher.org/authors/francisco-j-garcia>))

Even Rev. Dr. King kept exercising that muscle called faith. He, like we, head out of the house each day, looking for opportunities to be co-creators with God in our world. Each challenge is a new occasion to practice using our faith muscles. God will give us everything we need. We grow as disciples who work and witness to God’s incredible love and mercy.

Our faithful brothers and sisters in Florida are thinking that this morning, I hope and pray. For those who lost homes or have damage, I pray they will keep allowing God to show them what’s next. That they can walk in faith through the storm and after the storm.

Faith doesn’t come in quantities. Faith is trusting in a faithful God.

Secondly, faith is doing what God calls us to do, each and every day, whether we get thanked or not. We show up because we’re faithful and we serve an incredible Lord.

Finally, we exercise our faith muscle, learning to step one step at a time, trusting God will show us where to put our foot down.

Amen.

1. Martin Luther King, Jr., “The Strength to Love,” in *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1986), 508-509.

