

Just A Little Faith

Luke 17:5-10

17:5 The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!"

17:6 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.

17:7 "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'?"

17:8 Would 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'?"

17:9 Do you thank the slave for doing what was commanded?"

17:10 So 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!'"

How much faith do you have?

Comparing yourself to all the Christians in the world, would you put yourself in the top 10% of Christians with the most faith? Would you be above the 50% mark or below it? Or would you be dragging the bottom?

Faith. Do you have enough faith?

Do you have enough faith to get through this week?

Do you have enough faith for what lies ahead of you on down the road of your life?

Do you have enough faith to do what God wants you to do for the kingdom of God here on earth?

As you contemplate your answers to these questions you might want to keep in mind today's scripture lesson, a text that is puzzling, surprising, unexpected, Luke 17:5-10.

The disciples make what on the surface, on the face of it, at first glance, seems to be an appropriate request. The disciples seem to be model disciples, exemplary, commendable, praiseworthy disciples. "Increase our faith," they say to Jesus. That sounds like something a good Christian should want. What an excellent request. It's not like they are saying: Increase our pay so we can stay in a Holiday Inn Express and get a good night's rest. It's not like they are saying: Increase our 401K contributions. We'd like to buy a retirement pad in the ritzy section on the shores of Galilee. It's not like they are saying: Increase our exposure to the public. Jesus, you are talking way too much. You need to give us more time on stage. Why they are not even asking for seconds on desserts. It's not increase the banana pudding allotment or increase the death by chocolate serving. No, their request seems to be commendable, admirable, laudable. Increase our faith so we can do what you do. Increase our faith so we can be who you want us to be. Increase our faith, Jesus, so we can triumph over all that will be before us in the days ahead.

Yes, you would think “increase our faith” would bring a smile to Jesus’ face, a sense of “Well, they are finally---finally starting to get it. Finally, the thickheads, the clunker heads, the numb skulls, are beginning to put two and two together.” That’s what one would expect, but surprisingly, Jesus tells them they already have enough faith. Amazingly, Jesus tells the disciples what he needs them to do doesn’t really take a whole heck of a lot of faith in the first place. He says all you really need is faith the size of a mustard seed.

Say what? Come again. Run that by me one more time. Did you say what I thought you said?

Look at the front of your bulletin. See the picture of mustard seeds. Jesus was most likely referring to the black mustard seed which was grown for its production of oil. A mustard tree can grow up to fifteen feet and have a thick main stem with branches strong enough to bear the weight of a bird. But the point is a mustard seed is in the category of the smallest of all seeds in that area. We’re talking tiny. We’re talking miniscule. We’re talking infinitesimal. To have faith the size of a mustard seed is to just barely have faith. If you have faith at all it would be hard to have less faith than faith the size of a mustard seed.

So---so rethink all those passages in which Jesus says “your faith has made you well.” It wasn’t that they had finally achieved some spiritual state of having a gob of faith, the right amount of faith. It was that they had an ounce of faith which was enough, enough to be healed, enough to be turned in the right direction, enough to do what Jesus wanted them to do.

Now I’ve been around some Christians and I’ve been in some steeples where it seems there’s some kind of “faith Olympics” going on, some kind of faith contest, some kind of let’s see who is the biggest and “bestest” Christian of them all. Who prays the most? Who prays the longest prayers? Who can quote the most scripture? Who does the most in the church? Who is the individual most able to “turn it over to the Lord” and not worry about whatever needs to be turned over?

Faith Olympics----- in the steeples----among the Christians. Who gets the gold medal?

Yes, there are some Christians who act as if they have enough faith for themselves and ten more people. They’ve got so much faith I worry they are going to overshoot heaven. But most of us honest Christians, Christians who aren’t out to prove ourselves or make up for some great misdeed in our past, most of us from time to time if the truth be known have times when we question if we have enough----enough faith. We have occasions in which it seems our faith gauge is sitting on empty.

The good news is it’s normal to have those thoughts and feelings. And the even better news is that Jesus says all we need is a tee tiny bit of faith.

Jesus' response totally demolishes our presuppositions, doesn't it?

Jesus goes on to say that if we have any faith at all, we can do stupendous miracles. Move trees into oceans. Move mountains into oblivion. Help the UNC football win a football game.-----

Erase that one last one. To do unbelievable miracles, Jesus says, all it takes----all it requires is a minuscule amount, no more than that symbolized by a tiny mustard seed.

Walter Wink, Professor of Biblical Interpretation at Auburn Seminary in New York City, says the problem is that we have faith in the wrong things. We believe in money, or power, or our resume.

Our faith is in the wrong things and the problem is, Wink continues,----the problem is we trust that things will turn out bad. Move trees into the ocean? If we tried moving a tree we'd kill the tree, or the tree, falling the wrong way, would hit our house. If we tried moving a tree we would have to go to the chiropractor for seven years.-----Yeah, you know who you are.

Always expecting the negative to happen. Are you like that? Do you assume things will turn out bad?

What are your negative beliefs?-----What is your negativity about?-----What is its source, its origin?

If we have even an inkling, an inkling of trust in God, says Jesus, that will be enough to change the very face of reality, that will be enough to move a big red oak into the Atlantic.

Do you have evidence in your own life that what I am saying, no, what Jesus is saying, is true? Has having just a little faith been enough?

A small group of peasants lived on a piece of land in Brazil, which was wanted for development by the government and private business interests. To make their land seizure legal, those who wanted it got the Congress to declare the land theirs. The peasants were pushed off the land, their houses and crops destroyed.

As the people moved on to start over, this action was repeated several times. Whenever the peasants tried to resist, the police came in with force, wounding and killing some of them. Their burden of suffering was tremendous.

So when it became known that they were about to be pushed off their land yet again, one person asked, "Why should we resist? It will just mean that more of us will lose our lives." Another pointed out that even if they were not killed, they would die slowly of starvation. Without land, they had no way to live, no way to plant or grow food. Despair was the prevailing mood, until some of the women got an idea.

With a little research, the women found out where all the members of the Congress lived. While the government officials were at work in their offices, the women went with their children—each to a different house—and sat on the front lawns of the luxurious homes. These were some of Brazil's most prestigious neighborhoods, and the sight of ragged women and their children on the lawns was an extraordinary and curious sight. After a while some of the wives of the Congress members went out with bread. The mothers told them, "We want no bread from you."

Some of the wealthy women came out with money. "We have not come here for money," said the mothers.

Eventually each wife asked, "What do you want?"

The peasant women answered, "We are going to die. And since this is a nice place, we thought we would like to die here."

Then the wives asked, "Why are you going to die?"

And the mothers told of how their land was about to be stolen again, how their children were going to starve, and how the Congress was voting to make their doom legal. The phones at the Congress began buzzing. Every wife called her husband to plead with him not to vote for the bill in Congress. And in the end, the people kept their land and their future.

Just a little faith. That's all it took. A mustard seed size faith did the trick. Just a little faith is stronger than a ton of despair. Just a little faith is enough to move mountains.

Sometimes our lives feel all entangled and firmly anchored. Often times our situation feels like it is in cement. Jesus reminds us our life can be better. Major changes for the better for us can become reality.

And yes, frequently the problems of the world seem overwhelming. But Jesus reminds us to think big, even if our faith is small.

So here we are at the table this morning. Here we are at the table in whatever emotional or spiritual or physical shape we are in. In remembrance of me, Jesus said. Eat the bread in remembrance of me. Drink the cup in remembrance of me. And so we do. We eat and drink remembering that in the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus himself was a bit short on faith. Let this cup pass from me, he cried. Let this cup pass from me, he blubbered out. And on the cross Jesus said, "My God, my God, why---tell me why you have forsaken me." He just had a little faith, but the little faith he had was enough. Enough for him and enough for us.

May God this morning, as we come to the table---may God this morning with the little faith we have empower us to think big and to do all----to do all God would have us to do for ourselves, for others, for this church, and for the world.