

A Bit of Faith
Luke 17:5-10
Preached October 5, 2025

How many of you have ever asked for God's help? When you face rough moments or challenges that seem insurmountable what do you say- to yourself, to others or to God? Some of my favorite quips are "Seriously, God?", "Give me a brake", and "Ok, you can stop now." But my all-time favorite comment is 'Lord, have mercy.' I imagine you sometimes feel the same way.

So, we can have some sympathy for the disciples when, in today's Scripture, they cry out to Jesus "Give us more faith". That may seem like a common request, because as Christians having faith is a good thing, and who doesn't want, or need, more faith. But you usually don't plead for it until there seems to be a dang-near impossible requirement laid on you.

I guess the disciples had hit their limits. Since the day that they had come to know Jesus he had been laying down some heavy demands. His opening proviso was "You must be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect." (Matthew 5:48) Then he goes on to say 'Deny yourself, take up your cross and follow me.' (Matthew 16:24) He sharpened that word with 'unless you hate your father and mother, you are not worthy of me.' (Luke 14:26) And "none of you can be my disciples if you do not give up all your possessions." (Luke 14:33)

Those words are all hard to take in, but it seems Jesus' followers hit tilt after Jesus's words to them earlier in this passage. You see, Jesus had been sharing a lot of parables about God's grace and, just as importantly, our responses to his grace, and our behavior as his people. Now he gets very direct with living as disciples and he reminds them, not just to keep yourself from harming others, but to confront those who do, and more importantly to forgive each other, as often as necessary, even beyond the reasonable, to the proverbial seventy time seven.

That is when the disciples came unglued. They are truly stunned, and cry out 'Lord, increase our faith!' Now, I don't think the disciples were using hyperbole in their reaction. They really felt the need for more faith. Who hasn't felt that way; not just because of the expectation laid out before us, but because it will be impossible under our own steam.

Jesus' response to the disciple's clamor can seem a bit harsh, but it is also encouraging. "If you have faith like a mustard seed..." Now Jesus was not implying that they lacked faith, rather he was reminding them that they had all the faith they needed. They have been following him through thick and thin, learning and serving every day. They even recognized him as the Messiah and committed themselves to God's cause. That is the heart of faith!

So, what is Jesus implying? Jesus points us to the fact that faith isn't about quantity – how much or how little faith you have, but about what you do with the faith you already possess. Even a small amount of genuine faith, of trusting God and following his call, can lead to incredible things. That is his point in giving the unbelievable illustration of a sycamore tree uprooting itself, replanting in an ocean, and growing!

It is like the angel's response to Mary's question way back in Luke chapter one 'For nothing is impossible with God.' And Mary was convinced of that truth, which is why she said yes to God's call to be the mother of Christ. Do you think Billy Graham began his ministry assuming 'I'm going to lead tens of thousands of people to faith just by my preaching'? Do you think young Martin Luther King Jr anticipated that he would transform American culture and see Barack Obama become President within 50 years?

Do you need tons of faith to do those 'big things'? No, Jesus says, not really. In 'our bigger is better', next 'Bill Gates', culture we forget, or often ignore, the 'wee folks'- the thousands of people who marched, the generations of people who labored, on whose shoulders those 'giants' stand. And we forget or discount the wee things that are done in faith. But it is the 'wee things' Jesus holds up, the servant coming in from the field, the 'thankless work', and the recognition that all of us are just '... ordinary servants; All we've done is what we were supposed to do'.

This is what Jesus holds up as the answer to their prayer, doing the daily work, the everyday, ordinary tasks in everyday ordinary fashion; not because it is great, but because it is necessary, because that is what your faith calls you to do, plain and simple. Jesus isn't asking us to become the next Mother Theresa, or create the next Saddleback Church [thank you, Jesus]. But God is calling us to be whom He created us to be and do whatever we have been called to do – with humility, hope, and courage. And that, my friends, takes faith, sometimes more faith than we think we possess, even when Jesus says we have all we need. We just need to exercise it.

And indeed, faith is like a muscle. The more you use that muscle the stronger it becomes. And whenever you start exercising you don't start by lifting 100 pounds (or, as Jesus suggested, planting a tree in the Mariana Trench.) You start small, and build. You work consistently and purposefully. You attend to God's presence and purpose, in prayer and in action, and you watch for its fruit.

Faith is not a sprint; it is a marathon. You put one foot in front of the other, knowing that God will lead you where you need to be. And the challenges that we face are no longer obstacles but opportunities to use our faith, to grow as disciples and servants of God, to bring peace and blessings to our world.

Do we have challenges to face? You bet we do, everything from global warming to American politics and culture wars, to the everyday challenges of health and home, and the life and future of this church. Sometimes it seems like too much, (ok, it is too much, if we try to do it on our own). But we are not being asked to do it on our own. We are being asked, even summoned, to follow Christ, to lean on the Spirit's wisdom and guidance and strength. In other words, we are to have a little faith - and to act on it.

Which is what I intend to do. How about you?

Amen.

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