

Epworth Chapel on the Green  
October 6, 2013  
Pentecost 20  
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Habakkuk 1:1-2:4  
Psalm 37:1-18  
2 Timothy 1:1-14  
Luke 17:5-10

Our Gospel lesson today finds the disciples asking of Jesus something which every one of us has probably asked at some point in our lives: “Lord, give me more faith.”

In the disciples' case, this request comes after Jesus talks with them about the dangers of making other believers stumble, and after he instructs them that they must forgive those who wrong them, not merely once – but again and again and again.

And after hearing Jesus speak these words, the disciples begin to wonder if it is possible for *anyone* to live up to Jesus' expectations. Their response, then, seems natural and even appropriate: *Give us more faith.*

We also might be prone to ask Jesus to give *us* more faith when we sense that we've been asked to do the impossible. Our prayer usually arises from recognizing that what we need to see happen in our lives is beyond our capabilities. The mountain in front of us seems too high to climb. We realize that we cannot climb it alone. And so we pray: "Lord, give me more faith."

And what is Jesus' response to this request? It may surprise you to learn how he responds here to the disciples.

On the surface, it appears that Jesus is bringing the disciples up short, scolding them for their small amount of faith. He says to them, "if you had faith as small as a mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, 'may God uproot you and throw you into the sea,' and it would obey you."

Now we know that the mustard seed is not a large seed. So it's almost as if Jesus is saying, "wow, you have such a small amount of faith and you really need more."

But as is often the case in the Bible, little words are important. The little word "if" here in Jesus' statement is just such a case. In the Greek, there are two types of conditional statements. One type is a statement *contrary* to fact (i.e., If I were the Mayor of Boise, I would...."). The second type of conditional statement is a statement that is true to fact (i.e., If I were the pastor of Epworth, I would....).

Guess which type of statement Jesus uses here with his disciples when he says, "if you had faith the size of a mustard seed?" Jesus is expressing a statement that is *true* to fact. Jesus' words here could be translated "if you had faith as small as a mustard seed, *and you do* -- then you could say to this mulberry tree, be uprooted and cast into the sea, and it would obey you."

Did you catch this? Jesus is telling these disciples, "you have enough faith to move mountains."

I suspect he would say the very same thing to us this morning. If you have even the tiniest amount of faith, you have enough faith to see the hand of God work the miraculous in your life. You don't need *more* faith, because it's not the size of your faith that is the issue.

Faith is not some kind of commodity, something that can be stockpiled. That is why Jesus says right here that a small scrap of faith -- even a tiny, minuscule amount -- is enough. With faith the size of a mustard seed, you can tap into the power of God and see amazing things accomplished.

Faith is not a commodity, and faith is not even an *idea*. **Faith is a muscle – and the more we use that muscle, the stronger it gets.**

It can be easy for us to read Jesus' teachings, to listen to his stories, and to conclude that the standard is just too high for us to live up to. But I believe that what Jesus says here demolishes that kind of thinking. According to Jesus, we have been given all that we need. According to Jesus, the small amount of faith that we possess is more than adequate.

Our problem is that more often than not we view faith, and the actions of faith, as something *heroic*. Something monumental.

But Jesus seems to say here that faith is not doing heroic deeds, but simply doing your job, doing your duty, because it needs doing. *Faith is doing the small things that need done right in front of you, right now.* When Jesus says that faith the size of a small mustard seed can move mountains, I believe he is saying that when you boil it all down, *it doesn't take all that much faith to be faithful.*

It is the simple things we do, the things done in the course of our day-to-day existence, that end up having a huge impact. And Jesus says that we've got all that we need to be faithful, because in the final analysis being faithful is about recognizing all the God-given opportunities just to show up and to do what needs to be done.

It's not the *size or amount* of your faith that is the issue. You don't need more faith. Your faith is more than adequate. Jesus says that what you need is to *take a risk and act on the faith you already have.* Faith is a muscle. And the more you use a muscle, the stronger it gets. And the way we exercise our faith muscles is in the ordinary, everyday stuff of life where the main requirement is just showing up.

Return with me to Habakkuk. After Habakkuk pleads with God and questions God, God responds to the prophet and says, "the righteous shall live by their faith."

The Hebrew term there is better translated “faithfulness.” It has to do with obeying God’s covenant. It is not a term simply of belief or intellectual assent, but a term of action and obedience.

It is not surprising, then, to find that when this term “faith” is used in the New Testament, almost 50% of the time it can also be rendered “faithfulness” or “obedience.”

This, brothers and sisters, is the picture of biblical faith. In the Scriptures, faith is more than just assenting to truth with your brain cells. Faith involves *acting on what you know*.

Think with me for a moment of the great list of heroes of the faith in Hebrews chapter 11.

Abraham did not say: “God, give me more faith, and I’ll leave my homeland and family and start this great adventure.”

Noah did not say: “Lord, increase my faith, and I’ll start building the ark.”

Joshua did not say: “Lord, give me more faith and I’ll get the people together and start marching around Jericho.”

Esther did not say: “God, give me more faith and I’ll go in and risk my life by speaking with the King.”

Ruth did not say: “Lord, increase my faith and I’ll stay in Moab and risk isolation from my family and land and traditions.”

Gideon did not say: “God, increase my faith and I’ll cut my army of thousands down to just 300 men so that we can fight the Midianites.”

Now I have to believe that these great examples of the faith were not that much different from you and me. Surely they experienced doubts and fears. Surely they were scared to death at points. I know I would be.

Surely their faith was only “mustard seed” size at points. What makes them so great, then? What made them great was that *they took a risk and acted on the faith they had*. Little became much, because God was in it. And the world has never been the same.

Now let me quit preaching here and go to meddling. Let me ask you a question this morning: What is happening in your life right now that is prompting you to say, “Lord, give me more faith?”

What would you do right now in your life, *if only* you had a little more faith?

Now hear the voice of Jesus: “Child, *your tiny amount of faith is enough. Just step out and act on it.*”

As you come to the Lord’s Table this morning, I invite you to bring with you that situation in your life where you have been asking, “Lord, give me more faith.” As you meet him here, let him fill you with his grace. Then *step out* and act on the faith you have. Just show up, and by God’s grace do what is in front of you for

this day. And just wait and see. After you string enough ordinary days of faith together, you'll discover that God has moved a mountain in your life.

In the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.