

17th Sunday after Pentecost October 2 2022

Luke 17:5-10

This week's gospel reading begins with a request from those sent out by Jesus into the world that many of us may recognize, "Increase our faith!" they said.

That cry often comes in the midst of trial or difficulty, when a family member falls seriously ill, when being faithful costs something in our lives, when life seems to be just too much. It is then we often cry to God, "You haven't provided enough to do what is before me. Give me more!"

Jesus' response to this cry from the disciples is instructive, "If you had faith the size of a mustard seed..." and the language used has an implied, "and you do!" Jesus is telling the disciples, "What you have been given, even if it seems tiny compared to what you face, is enough."

What Jesus is saying is that faith is not something that you can quantify in that way. It won't grow by 25% this year. Rather, it's like being pregnant, either you are or you aren't. When you receive the gift of faith, which God in Jesus has already given us through the Holy Spirit, then that gift of faith is sufficient to what you are called to, because for God all things are possible and if God calls us to do an impossible thing (love your enemy and pray for those who persecute you) then we have what is needed to make that happen.

Faith is not something you increase or store up. Rather, especially in the gospel of Luke, it is something you use. Faith is a verb, an action, an activity. It is not a quantity, but an energy expressed in loving God with all that we are and have and loving our neighbor as ourselves.

You have faith, Jesus says, because you have seen me and known me. Because I have met you in the Word proclaimed and read, in the bread and wine you have received at my table, because I have covered you with my very life freely given in the waters of baptism. Because you are in relationship with me and that is enough. Enough for anything that lies ahead. Enough to follow him along the way. Our faith, what we have right now, is enough.

Have you ever done a trust fall before? I was up at Camp EWALU this weekend and that kind of activity is central to what happens there. For a trust fall, you stand up on a picnic table, your fellow campers line up behind you and extend their arms out, creating a bed of arms between them. You turn you back to them, cross your arms, and fall straight back keeping your body rigid.

It can be terrifying! The threshold to cross that line of standing up and starting to fall back takes faith to cross over. But once you do! Once you land safely in those arms of your fellow campers. Once you have that physical reminder of the trustworthiness of these fellow human beings, the next time is easier. It's not without fear, but that trust is strengthened, provides a firmer anchor so that threshold is easier to cross over.

We trust that with God all things are possible. That even a pin's head worth of faith is enough to change nature itself. That we have what we need to cross over that threshold and do what terrifies us, what seems impossible.

As we think about this household of God that is St. John, what seemingly impossible tasks has God called us to do? How has God called us to live out our faith as we feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and shelter the homeless? As we see the Lazarus' outside our door and do what Jesus did and care for them.

For many years, this little church has used its mustard seed of faith to faithfully live out its calling in the world. This past year, our Ely Community Food Drive gathered nearly 1 ton of food and non-perishable items for local food pantries. Our Dorcas Quilters have been working for years, but this year they have created 54 quilts to be sent to those who have suffered disasters like hurricanes, famine, flood, and war.

We have taken our little bit of faith and done marvelous things, one tiny stitch, one bag of groceries, one dollar given at a time. We have trusted that God in Jesus Christ has our backs and leaned back into these things that seem crazy or difficult and time and again realized we have landed safe in the arms of our God.

Of this cry to increase our faith, author Barbara Brown Taylor says it is a symptom of our societal expenditure of a great deal of time and energy looking for the "key to the treasure box of More." All we lack, she argues, "is the willingness to imagine that we already have everything we need." This applies to all that God has given us. Faith, gifts and talents, wealth.

The promise of God is that we have already been provided with what we need to do the ministry that God is calling us to. Individually and corporately. We have the financial resources, the individual gifts and talents, the imagination and energy to live out our calling of being an outpost of the reign of God here on earth.

I was at our synod Fall Leadership Conference this past Sunday through Tuesday. It was wonderful to actually see my fellow pastors and deacons in person after several years of online meetings. Yet, I must admit that sometimes at these events, when we talk about our ministries and what our congregations are doing,

I find myself falling into that search for the treasure box of More. I begin to think, well, if only we had more...

But in pondering this text, I realized that really that kind of thinking was just an excuse to do nothing. It really was a lack of trust in God. Because Jesus says, all it takes is a pinhead worth of faith to do amazing things, and I've already given you that.

These past two years have been difficult for everyone, and the world has changed around us, both as individuals and as the Body of Christ that is the church. The next year will be just as challenging, in ways we can't even imagine right now.

What we know, what God in Jesus has promised, is that we have been given everything we need to walk through those times and do amazing things in the name of Christ. It just takes remembering that faith is a verb, it is expressed in the actions we take in life. In leaning back into that trust fall, in stepping across the threshold and feeding Lazarus, in being so bold as to say- no, now is a time to rest in the arms of my God.

I am inviting all of us to trust that God has given us enough and engage in some faith disciplines that will strengthen the foundation of that faith and move us forward in the mission and ministry God has called us to.

One way of doing that is I will be inviting you to join me, beginning in Advent (which begins November 27) in reading through the Bible in one year. We believe that this library of books is God's Word to us. It is the rule and norm of our faith, the measuring stick against which all of our beliefs about God, us, and the world are held up to. Yet, I do not know it as well as I ought. I continue to learn more about God, myself, and the world as I read it. I invite you to join me in leaning

back and trusting that an investment of time in the Word of God will do amazing things in our lives.

Another way to lean back in faith is to participate in the discipline of first fruits giving through completing an estimate of giving card in our Stewardship Campaign- *The Household of God*. You should be receiving one in the mail in the next week for your household to prayerfully consider and fill out. We will ask that you bring your completed cards on Sunday, October 16 during our worship together.

There will be three options on the card- one indicates a growth in giving towards a tithe (10%) of our income. Another indicates that you are stepping up to a tithe. A final one is that you are stepping beyond a tithe.

We will ask you to state what your monthly commitment is to giving to the mission and ministry of St. John out of the abundance God has given you to steward.

As we said last week, this discipline is about our relationship with God as much as it is funding the ministry we do. It is faith in action as we lean back and trust that God has given us enough to share generously with others, and that our little bit that we offer, when combined with our neighbors, will be more than enough to do amazing things.

We will also ask you to complete a gifts, skills, and talents form. A means to help you recognize and name the unique abilities God has given you and help us to know where and how we might invite you to share that ability to further the ministry God has called us to.

Friends, the promise of Jesus is that we have everything we need, right now, to do the ministry we are called to. We have the faith, the gifts and talents, the resources to live individually and together a life fuller and more abundant than anything we can do according to our own plan. Like Paul, every time I think of you, I thank my God, remembering the faith that has lived in your ancestors and that also lives now in you. A faith that may seem as small as a mustard seed, but which with God's help, can do amazing deeds. Let us join together in leaning back in faith and trust the God who loved us enough to send God's own Son so that we might live life fuller and more abundant. Thanks be to God.