

Increasing Faith
October 3, 2010
Luke 17:5 – 10

The Word of God for the People of God.

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

⁶He replied, "If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it will obey you.

⁷"Suppose one of you had a servant plowing or looking after the sheep. Would he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, 'Come along now and sit down to eat'? ⁸Would he not rather say, 'Prepare my supper, get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink'? ⁹Would he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do? ¹⁰So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.' "

This is the Word of God and It can be trusted. Thanks be to God.

Let us pray:

Jesus, in this era, many people are unaware of themselves as loved children of God redeemed by Jesus and destined for eternal joy. Jesus, we acknowledge that there are mounting personal, family and social pressures, alienations and separations that surround each of us; families and individuals suffer ordeals and tragedies. Help us to trust God's mercy in all these things. Help us to trust that you will continually offer us forgiveness and love. Open our hearts to the mercy that You desire to flood into our lives. Help us to trust that Your love for our dear ones will protect and lead them to heaven. Do not allow us to let the clouds of this life deceive us. The intensely shining Sun of Your Mercy burns brightly above all clouds! We offer praise and thanksgiving to Your merciful love for us and acknowledge not only our need, but your ability and willingness to provide for the needs in the name of your Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen!

Our reading today begins with the disciples making a request of Jesus, “Increase our Faith. Help us to believe more than we do right now because obviously we do not believe enough.” It seems like an unusual request, don’t you think? Here are the followers of Christ who have been with Jesus for a prolonged period of time. They have seen Jesus perform miracles and have listened to his teachings. They have given up all that they know in life to follow this man and to learn from him and yet they are just now beginning to realize that maybe the faith that had lead them to leave their lives; their families, friends and careers behind and to step into the unknown, to step into the Will of God, maybe, just maybe isn’t enough. So they are now asking for more faith. But why? Is it that they are beginning to regret their decision to follow him or is it more? A since of self awareness; a since that maybe they, in all their humanity just don’t measure up to what God has called them to do.

We’ve all found ourselves in this situation at some time or another. If you are sitting here today and are thinking to yourself, “no, not me, I’m very comfortable with what God has called me to do,” then maybe you need to reexamine the call on your life. God does not call us to be comfortable. God does not call us to revel in faith and to walk a path that is easy and effortless. No, God calls us to much more. We must continually be striving to achieve what God asks of each of us. If it were not for the challenges of our faith, then there would be no faith at all.

So what is it that God has asked these disciples to do that has called them to become aware of their own inabilities? What is it that God is asking of you today that is equally causing you to become aware of your own inabilities? If we look at the line that precede our reading today, verses 1 – 4, we see that Jesus is instructing them about forgiveness. “¹Jesus said to his disciples: "Things that cause people to sin are bound to come, but woe to that person through whom they come. ²It would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied

around his neck than for him to cause one of these little ones to sin. ³So watch yourselves. "If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. ⁴If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, 'I repent,' forgive him."

"Whoa, wait a minute! You're saying that I have to forgive someone who continually wrongs me? I can't forgive someone who hurt me 5, 10 or 20 years ago for wronging me just once, and now you are asking me to forgive someone who has wronged me seven times in a single day?" Yes, that is exactly what we are to do. The disciples knew that this wasn't natural. It just simply is not the way that the world works and if you're going to ask me to do something that radical, then you're going to have to give me more faith because I just don't have it in me to do what you are asking me to do.

Do you see a flaw in the reasoning of the disciples? Do you see the flaw in our own thinking? In asking God to increase our faith, to magically give us the ability to do what God ask of each of us we eliminate two very important elements from the equation: (1) our need to struggle to succeed and (2) our need to rely on God. Now I know what some of you are thinking this morning, "Aren't I acknowledging my reliance on God by asking for an increase of my faith?" Well, the hard reality of it all is a simple response of, "No." Just because we say we have faith, doesn't mean that we do. Just because we believe that we are relying on God doesn't mean that we genuinely are. Which is more satisfying, "Me giving you \$1000 or you earning it?" It is easy to say that a gift would be equally as satisfying, but if we think about it long enough, I think that we would agree that satisfaction is obtained when we have struggled for it. It is the difference in being spoiled and being made to recognize responsibility in our lives.

For the disciples, as well as for each of us today, today's reading is a lesson in not acknowledging our inabilities, but in acknowledging the source of the abilities we do have;

particularly those abilities that maybe we have not yet tapped into. The abilities that we don't even know are there. Jesus response to them is this, "If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it will obey you." (v. 6) A familiar verse, I'm sure, but do we truly understand what Christ is saying in these 29 words. Why a mustard seed, a mulberry tree and the sea? Why not an acorn, an oak tree and the desert?

Well, if you've ever seen a mustard seed you would know that it is very, very small. It doesn't take a lot of faith to see big results, but let's not limit our understanding to just that. A mustard seed, for all intents and purpose is so small that it would be easy to say that if you had one in the palm of your hand that you would seemingly be holding nothing. Can something so powerful as the ability to command the uprooting of a mulberry tree come from *nothing*? "Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and He separated the light from the darkness." (Genesis 1:3 – 4) The very beginnings of Creation were spawned from nothing, so why not expect that same power to reside within faith the size of a mustard seed, with faith that measures nearly *nothing*.

A mulberry tree has an incredibly complicated root system. The roots run deep and are grossly entangled within the earth. To require a mulberry tree to uproot itself and be moved speaks much more to the alliteration we read on the surface of these words. It speaks to much more than that. Each of us has a root system that runs deep within us and our roots are deeply rooted and grossly entangled. Before we can tap into the power of our faith, we must be willing to untangle some of the mess we have in our own lives. We must be willing to struggle, strive and work hard to sort out our own mess before we can ever hope to gain a grasp on the command

to love, encourage, nurture, protect, to serve and to forgive one another. Don't ask for more faith until you have room for it and right now many of us don't even have room in our lives for the faith the size of a mustard seed, as powerful as it may be.

Once we make just enough room in our lives for the faith of that magnitude, the simple enormity of a mustard seed then we can begin to do great things, but we must first untangle the roots of our own life's issues. Then, and only then, will we be able to move forward with God's will and way for our lives. We are the mulberry tree; the binding issues and short comings of our lives are the roots. Once we, through the simple amount of faith afforded to each of us, even in the amount of near nothingness, acknowledge our short comings and work on untangling them can we begin to move about freely doing as God has called us to do; even to the sea, which for us is a symbol of the world at large. You see, increasing faith is not about having more, but rather it is about the realization of the source of the faith that we already have.

From nothing, Creation was spoken into existence by God. It is that same light, that same power that resides within each of us and in acknowledging that presence and power of God in our lives, we have the ability to do great things; not for us but for the bringing of God's Kingdom into a lost and dying world. We are to untangle our own messes, step out in the faith that we already possess and trust that God knows what God is asking of each of us. "If God be for us, then who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31) Are we so set in our ways, so deeply rooted in this world and in the comfort of our own lives that we have forgotten that it is God that controls our every essence and being? The same God that breathed life into humankind is the same God that has breathed life into each of us. Are we honoring our creation today or have we forgotten that all of creation; each square inch of the Earth on which we walk each day is Holy

Ground! The same ground, incidentally from which each of us were made and to which each of us will one day return.

Know that you can increase your faith today, not in substance but in practice. This altar is open this morning and is available for prayer, mediation and most particularly it offers a place where reconciliation can begin to take place. Don't leave here today without beginning to untangle the roots of the messes of your life. Depression, unforgiveness, hatred, eternal separation from God, heartache and pain has no power over the faith provided to each of us in the size of a mustard seed.

Acknowledging today the presence of the creation bearing power of the light brought forth out of darkness and the breath of life within each of us, let us offer up praise and glory today to Our Creator and God. Amen.