

Enough
Luke 17: 5-10
Eastminster Presbyterian Church
October 4, 2020... World Communion Sunday

Corrie ten Boom wrote: It takes the same amount of energy to worry as it does to pray. One leads to fear. The other one to faith. Choose wisely.

There is absolutely no doubt that we, as a world, have come face to face with both fear and faith during these unimaginable months. If you are like me, I have found my comfort and hope in the scriptural stories of faith. And more often than not, my connection to Jesus' messages of faith and hope and love come through my connection to the disciples. They ask the human questions that are on my heart. I can identify with their responses and I can understand why they feel the way they feel and do what they do. And for them, I am grateful. They are my hope that even when the average person like me messes up, I am still invited to dine with the Lord. The disciples and I, and we, have this in common. Here we sit, just as we are, guests at the Lord's Table.

Just before this passage, Jesus had been teaching the disciples about the seriousness of their roles. People would be watching them. Listening to them. Following Jesus or not because of them. In other words, they had the potential to be stumbling blocks or building blocks. As followers, Jesus was asking of them to love their enemies, forgive even when undeserved, give without expecting in return, and to be ready to take up their crosses. Now that is a list folks! I could imagine myself saying, "I think I am going to need a little help accomplishing this Lord! Can you whatasize my faith?"

It sounds like a reasonable, faithful request, does it not? However, according to the Greek, Jesus responds with snarkiness, which is a level above irritation. We are not used to this side of Jesus, are we? But, honestly, we know that Jesus has reason to be a bit snarky with the disciples at times. As his students and followers, they have witnessed first-hand the responses and actions of Jesus. They know what is being asked of them, and yet, how often do they wrestle with the wise and unwise choices. Just like us.

And then in what might seem a bit dramatic, Jesus tells them that if they had faith as small as a minute mustard seed, they could command a mulberry tree to uproot itself and replant in the sea, and it would obey. In other words, they have faith enough, if they choose to exercise it. Then he does a little jabbing by saying a slave, or in its original meaning, a servant, would not be so brave as to ask to dine with the master or expect praise for doing his or her daily household chores. In other words, why do the disciples think they can ask for or expect an extra measure of faith? For Jesus it smells a bit like entitlement.

So, I think Jesus has reason to be snarky, and even a bit bizarre with the flying mulberry bush, that stubborn, deeply-rooted plant near impossible to dig up. Perhaps not as bizarre as it seems when we step back in scripture and discover the disciples have had this preoccupation with flashy signs and wonders as a way to measure faith. Certainly, uprooting a near-permanent plant, and watching it fly to its new waterlogged destination would be pretty spectacular. They

have even been asking Jesus for an upgrade in their supernatural powers, like the ability to rain down fire on people who refused to welcome them in their homes. In other words, asking of Jesus power to punish.

Increasing their faith. Upgrading their power. Jesus' irritation plus is making more sense now. He sets about reminding them that loving others, forgiving, selflessness are the free choices we make as humans and every one of us has that choice. And that choice is not asking for more; it is about trusting the faith with which each of has been gifted. So, to the disciple's request to inflict ill will on their enemies as a show of their extra faith, Jesus says, no way!

We do not get shares of faith in order to watch them multiple in our faith portfolio. The gift of faith is already woven into our very being. And honestly, who are we to tell God that we do not have enough faith to do the ministry we have been called to do, personally and as a community of faith. God always gives us enough to complete the work to which we have been called. So, Jesus cuts to the heart of the matter. His frustration is not so much about the disciples asking for more faith; it is fear that they do not have enough. It is questioning whether God's gift of faith to them is sufficient. So snarky or not, Jesus does what Jesus does, with continuing patience, he says, "Let me try to explain it this way."

The thing is, Jesus has been teaching the same lesson about faith time and again throughout Luke's gospel, leading up to this point. Faith is reaching out to Jesus, even if it means lowering a paralyzed man down through the tiles of roof, believing already in the healing power of Jesus. Faith is a centurion asking Jesus to heal his servant, even with his connection to the Roman government. It is the hemorrhaging woman risking her life to touch the hem of Jesus' coat, believing she will be healed. Sometimes the actions come first, and faith follows.

Every now and then we are gifted with the opportunity to make a big impact or do something dramatic, but if we only look for those heroic moments, we miss all the little ones in between. Faith, as Jesus describes it, is just doing your duty, not for rewards, but simply because it needs to be done. To the disciples then, and to us now, he says it does not take much faith to be faithful; it takes obedience and choosing wisely to do as Jesus has already done, choosing faith over fear.

Faith is a curious thing. In some circles, people believe that faith is about knowledge, proving that God is real or not real. In the Greek, the word we translate as faith is *πίστιν* (pisten) and its meaning speaks of trust. We need not prove anything about God. We choose to trust God's purpose for our lives or not.

Faith is not a mystical experience or a waving wand for requests to be granted. Faith is not about certainty or superiority. Faith is that tiny voice inside of us, sometimes the size of a mustard seed, that helps us make the right decisions day in and day out based on the life and teachings of Jesus. And Jesus is asking of us that we do not let our desire for more faith keep us from working with the faith we have. We have enough faith; what we need is more obedience.

What we do for God as a result of our faith is not dependent on how much of it *we* have. It is about *who God is*. One biblical commentator puts it like this: "The true miracle of Jesus' saying

is not about overcoming natural laws, by doing things like uprooting mulberry trees, but about the presence of *true* faith, a faith that takes hold of the God with whom ‘nothing is impossible.

On this World Communion Sunday, it is perhaps more important than ever in our lifetime to remember that across the world Christians are gathered in spirit at the Table of the Lord. In a world desperate for peace and justice, in a time when hatred and fear divide peoples, we need to be at the Lord’s Table, celebrating our oneness in Jesus. At the Table, we need to affirm that there are more important things in this world that unite us than things that divide us. Affirming and living that unity shows our obedience to Jesus as Lord of our lives. We are called to trust that God makes it possible for people to live together in peace and harmony because in Jesus we have been reconciled to God, and through Jesus we can be reconciled with one another.

In this parable Jesus says it is OK to start with tiny faithful decisions for unity and peace because it is not about us and how much faith we might have. It is about God faithfulness to us.

But should doubts start to arise again, as they did with the disciples, I challenge us to do this: Instead of gazing out a window looking for more or for something else, look into a mirror. See the beautiful reflection of the person God created you and me to be. Then, in all the imperfections, say to self, because of who God is, I am enough and through me, and through me, God can indeed move that mulberry tree! Instead of fearing the “not enough” of our lives; may we embrace the gift of God’s faith that is always enough.