

Sermon: If I just had a little more faith!

“If I just had more faith....”

I think most of us have struggled with that thought at some point in our lives. We think, if I just had more faith, I wouldn't have so many questions or doubts. If I just had more faith God would answer my prayers. If I just had more faith they would have recovered. If I just had more faith, I would be more involved in the church. If I just had more faith, I would be a better person, a better parent, a better spouse. If I just had more faith, I would know what to do, I would handle things better. If I just had more faith life would be different.

It is a tough one to work through. It is, however, an approach to faith that is at least as old as the apostles' own faith. It is the approach they have taken in today's gospel. “Increase our faith,” they asked Jesus.

Jesus has just warned them not to become stumbling blocks to others and instructed them to forgive as often as an offender repents even if it is seven times in one day. That will be difficult. It will be a challenge to live that way. “Increase our faith,” is their response. It seems like a reasonable request. If a little is good a lot must be better.

The request to increase our faith, the belief that if I had more faith things would be different, reveals, at best, a misunderstanding of faith itself and, at worst, demonstrates our own unfaithfulness. Jesus is very clear that faithfulness is not about size or quantity.

“If you had faith the size of a mustard seed,” he says, “you could say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and it would obey you.”

Faith is not given to us in a packet to be spent as currency in our dealings with God. Faith is not measured out according to how difficult the task or work before us is. Faith is not a thing we have or get.

Faith is a relationship of trust and love. It means opening ourselves to receive another’s life and giving our life to another. That other one is Jesus Christ. That one faith-relationship is influential of who we are and how we live.

Faith is not about giving intellectual agreement to a particular doctrine or idea. Faith is not about how much or how strongly we believe Jesus’s words or actions. When we speak about a married couple’s faithfulness, we do not mean they believe or agree with each other’s ideas or even a particular understanding of marriage. They are faithful because they have committed themselves to each other in love and trust. They are faithful because they continually give their life to the other and receive the other’s life as their own. They are faithful because they carry with them that one relationship wherever they go, in all that they are and all that they do. And that is how it is in our faith-relationship with Jesus.

Faith will not, however, change the circumstances of our lives. Instead, it changes us, personally. Living in faith does not shield us from the pain and difficulties of life, it does not undo the past,

and it will not guarantee a particular future. Rather, faith is how we face and deal with the circumstances of life – the difficulties and losses, the joys and successes, the opportunities and possibilities.

Faith does not get us a pat on the back, a reward, or a promotion in God's eyes. It is simply the way in which we live and move and have our being so that, at the end of the day, the faithful ones can say, without pride or shame, "We have done only what we ought to have done!" Nothing more and nothing less. We have lived in openness to, trust in, and love for Christ. We have allowed him to guide our decisions, our words, and our actions. We have been sustained by him in both life and death.

Faith, however, is not lived out in the abstract. It is practiced day after day in the ordinary everyday circumstances. Some days when the pain and heaviness of life seem more than we can carry it is by faith, relationship with Jesus, that we get up each morning and face the reality of life.

Other days present other circumstances. When we feel the pain of the world and respond with compassion by feeding the hungry, housing the homeless, speaking for justice; when we experience the brokenness of a relationship and offer forgiveness and mercy; when we see the downtrodden and offer our presence and prayers — in all those we have lived, seen, and acted by faith. Then there are days when we feel powerless, lost, and do not know the way forward. By faith we sit in silence and wait.

Faith, then, is how we live; the lens through which we see ourselves, others, and the world; the principle by which we act and speak. Faithfulness means that no matter where we go, no matter what circumstances we face we do so in relationship with the one who created, loves, sustains, and redeems us, the one who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

Jesus does not enlarge our faith. It is not necessary. We live by faith not because we have enough faith but because we have faith, any faith, even mustard seed sized faith. That is all we need. Jesus believes that. So should we.

It seems that it is so hard to have faith today. Looking at all the serious issues facing us on all fronts, it's hard not to think that the whole world itself is coming apart at the seams before our eyes. It is so easy to get overwhelmed. It is so easy to throw our hands up and ask God to fix it, or to *fix us* so we can keep moving. But, I think, the message of today's Gospel reading is that we're not suffering from a 'lack' of anything. We have what we need. We don't need 'more' faith.

We just need the faith and faithfulness we have.

We cannot solve the world's problems on our own. But God doesn't ask us to. What we *are* called to do is to live the life we've been given faithfully: to show up in all our relationships as best as we are able.

I am definitely not suggesting this is easy. It is hard. But, if we have been taught anything from our passage today, it is that each and every one of us is to live faithfully, to serve our communities,

and to grow into all that Jesus was and is. And the more of us do that, the more the world will change.

As Jesus says, this type of faith can move a mountain, or in the words of today's reading, a mulberry tree — a species whose root systems are as notoriously complicated and intractable as our world's countless problems.

The question is not how much faith we have but, rather, how are we living the faith we do have. How is our faith, our relationship with Jesus, changing our lives, our relationships, the lives of others?

If it is not, more of the same will surely make no difference. The mustard seed of faith is already planted within us. It is Christ himself. He has withheld from us nothing. We already have enough. We already are enough. We do not need more faith. We need more response to the faith, the Christ, the mustard seed, the relationship we already have.

So, as we face this new week and new month ahead of us, let us remember this powerful teaching from Jesus today: We don't need 'more' faith. We just need faith. Amen