

**Series: Lessons from the Lectionary**

**Today: Mustard Seed Faith**

**Text: Luke 17:5-10**

**A Communion Meditation preached by the Rev. Randolph T. Riggs, D.Min.**

**Sunday, October 3, 2010 (World Communion Sunday)**

**First Presbyterian Church of Lancaster, PA**

*“Increase our faith!”* If we have never identified with the disciples before, we can surely identify with that plea. *“Increase our faith!”* This is what they asked of Jesus.

I have been there. I imagine you have been there, too. You want to believe there is a God and that God is in charge. Then you look around and see the things that are happening in the world, and you wonder: *“If God is in charge, why do bad things happen to good people? Why are there children starving in 3<sup>rd</sup> world countries. Why does God allow a child to be born with AIDS? If God is in charge, how can God allow a mother abandon a baby and leave it to die? If God is in charge, how can God allow people of faith to use improvised explosive devices or fly planes into buildings and proceed to kill each other in the name of God? If God is in charge, WHY...? Increase our faith! Help us to understand how you are working, O God, so we can believe!!*

Or maybe it is more personal. Maybe there is something you feel God has been calling you to do; like going back to school, or taking a new position, addressing a problem in a relationship with someone you love, or facing the infirmities of age with acceptance and grace. *Increase our faith! Give us the courage to do what we don't seem to be able to do by ourselves!*

If you are waiting for God to give you a vision, strike you with a bolt of lightning, or perform some miraculous feat to help you feel more secure, what we have to say this morning will not provide you with much comfort. However, if you want a faith that is rooted in the

Biblical understanding of what it means to be a Christian, take heart. Jesus said, *“If you have faith as small as a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and it will obey you.”*

Did Jesus literally mean that we could move a tree if only we had enough faith? I don’t think so. Rather, it was the custom in near eastern culture to use language in the most vivid way possible. It is more likely that he is simply illustrating the point that if we place our faith in God, all things are possible. It doesn’t have to be a huge amount of faith, but it has to be a faith that trumps all of our fears, our doubts. If we will give God the smallest amount of faith we have, then we can trust that God will eventually give us the wisdom, courage, insight, or tenacity to move whatever obstacle is in our way in order to accomplish the things that God wants us to do.

There is nothing fancy in this passage. It is a simple reminder of two important elements in our Christian journey: FAITH AND FOOTWORK. Faith is seeking to align ourselves with the purposes of God. Footwork is doing the things which will help the purposes of God become a reality in our lives and in the life of our world.

### **FAITH**

Corrie Ten Boom uses the letters of the word to define her understanding of faith. She says that Faith is the Fantastic Adventure In Trusting Him. Faith believes that God wants what is best for us and for the world in which we live. Faith believes that this is why Jesus came. It is looking at whatever circumstance comes our way and trusting that God will give us the resources to deal with it; that no matter what the circumstances, God is able to meet us at the point of our need.

Ella Wheeler Wilcox caught the essence of mustard seed faith in his poem entitled *Tis the*

*Set of the Sail:*

*But to every mind there openeth,  
A way, and way, and away,  
A high soul climbs the highway,  
And the low soul gropes the low,  
And in between on the misty flats,  
The rest drift to and fro.*

*But to every man there openeth,  
A high way and a low,  
And every mind decideth,  
The way his soul shall go.*

*One ship sails East,  
And another West,  
By the self-same winds that blow,  
'Tis the set of the sails  
And not the gales,  
That tells the way we go.*

*Like the winds of the sea  
Are the waves of time,  
As we journey along through life,  
'Tis the set of the soul,  
That determines the goal,  
And not the calm or the strife.*

Jesus said all we need to have is faith, as small as a grain of mustard seed. We don't need degrees in theology or know everything there is to know about the Bible. We need only believe that God is constantly seeking that which is best for us and for the world in which we live, and then seek to align ourselves with the purposes of God.

### **FOOTWORK**

Jesus connects this statement about faith with a reflection on the responsibility of discipleship. He tells us that we have two choices in life. We can live as though life owes us something, or we can live as though we owe God something. Our faith will increase as we do what we are called to do as followers of Jesus. The choice is ours.

The grace of God may be free, but it is not cheap. It requires those who receive it to give of themselves. We are expected to use our time, our talent, and our treasure which is a gift from God in order to care for the world which God Created. Doing our best to serve God and our fellow human beings on planet earth is only doing what is expected of us. Seeking to use that which God has given us to the best of our ability is not a choice. It is a responsibility.

I have used this story before, but it is too good not to use again on this World Communion Sunday. It is a fable about a man who spoke to God about heaven and hell. The Lord said to the man, *“Come and let me show you what hell looks like.”* They entered a world where a group of people sat around a huge pot of stew. However, everyone in the room looked as though they were starving to death. While everyone had a spoon which reached the pot, each spoon handle was longer than their arms. They could not get the food from the pot to their mouths, and they were dying of starvation.

*“Come now and let me show you heaven,”* said the Lord. They entered another room that was identical to the first. There was the pot of stew, the group of people, and the long handled spoons. However, in this room everyone looked happy and was well nourished.

*“I don’t get it,”* said the man. *The rooms are exactly the same. The food is exactly the same. Why are these people happy while the others are miserable?* And God smiled and said, *“It is simple. Here they have learned if they try to do it on their own, they will die, but if they feed each other they will live.”*

### **CONCLUSION**

Once again, just like last week, the writer of Luke is relentless. He reminds us that we are disciples of Jesus. We are in his debt. We are the servants, and the increase of faith we seek will

only come as we do what is expected of us. We will not be praised for what servants should do. That is the minimum. That is expected.

So we come to be fed for the journey of faith. Once again God meets us at the point of our need. If we will bring him faith as small as a grain of mustard seed and trust him, really trust him, he will supply what we need to take that next step in the journey. It is here we can ask the questions why, and as we are fed, the answers seem less and less important because we discover that what is really important is following Christ and doing what is expected of us as his disciples.

This is the Lord's Table, and you are welcome here.