

St. Matthews, Acton  
October 6, 2019

**“MUSTARD SEED FAITH”  
Luke 17:5-10**

Faith is gift to us. Faith as trusting in God’s presence and goodness. Faith as believing in something far greater than what I know. Faith that we are loved and held by God -- deeply, freely, unreservedly.

Jesus tells us that we have the faith that we need – to be the people God creates us to be, calls us to be, needs us to be – in this life and in this world.

But our morning’s Gospel begins with a request/demand from the Disciples to Jesus: Give us more faith.

Often in our Gospels, the collective and individual voices of the Disciples reflect our questions, doubts, and struggles. Here, the Disciples voice our own plea to Jesus: Give us more faith. We need more faith.

The Disciples’ demand (and ours?) seems to come from trying to measure or somehow quantify the gift of faith. How do we know how much is enough? In my experience, I have heard and seen many moments when folks think that if they just pray a little bit more or believe a little bit harder (whatever that might look like), then something magical will happen. It seems that sometimes we feel that we don’t have faith, or don’t have enough faith, that how we are somehow is not enough, it doesn’t measure up.

While not wanting to discount the possibility of miracles, the gift of faith is not magic. Faith is not “don’t worry, be happy” and God will make everything turn out just the way we would like it. Faith is not like a vending machine that you offer up sufficient payment in order for God to give us what we want.

There are some voices in our larger Christian family that will tell us that we need to send money to a certain ministry so that what we have prayed for will happen. Or we may talk ourselves into a place in which we think we just need to behave differently: try harder or believe more (again: whatever that might mean), and things will go our way.

The main thing is that faith is about our walk with God and God’s walk with us. Every day. “To have faith means having our whole way of perceiving and responding to life transformed through a lens of God’s creative justice and power.” [Lois Malcolm, RCL Commentary]

Our experience of faith may indeed change with our seasons in life, it may mature and deepen. But when it comes down to it, says Jesus, the gift that we have been given is good. It is sufficient. However it is. Jesus tells the Disciples even the tiniest element of faith in our lives with God, (as tiny as a poppy seed or mustard seed) gives us spirit and perceiving and understanding and strength to live amazing lives as disciples, as servants, as God’s people in the world.

In Luke’s Gospel, over and over again we see that the people who we might least expect to have faith become examples of the gift lived out in real time. The woman with the ointment. The blind beggar. The Samaritan leper. The woman seeking to be healed of her hemorrhages. In all of these, Jesus says that their faith has saved them – even though they were “sinners,” outcasts, certainly not of the religious crowd of the day.

Faith is gift to us – it’s in us/part of us (thanks be to God) -- and even what we might consider the smallest element of faith can help us grow in peace and love and understanding and

patience. Can help us to grow in seeing God's presence and hand in our lives and in our midst and working in our world. Can move us to respond to God's call for justice and self-giving and service in the midst of a broken and hurting world.

If you've been following the news, you know that a former police officer in Dallas was convicted and sentenced last week for killing a man whose apartment she entered thinking it was hers. At her sentencing hearing, the younger brother of the man who had been killed spoke of his pain and loss and then spoke of his experience of God and of grace and forgiveness. This young man said to his brother's killer: "I want the best for you." [If you haven't seen the video, it is quite powerful.]

"To have faith means having our whole way of perceiving and responding to life transformed through a lens of God's creative justice and power." [Lois Malcolm, RCL Commentary]

What is your experience in faith? With faith? What does it look like in your life?

Is it a matter of heart and perspective that calls you beyond the present moment? Is it believing in something that you can't understand but which helps you in your everyday? Is it spirit which motivates you to serve, reach out, speak out? Again, Jesus affirms the gift in us - even what we may think is the smallest of faith - and its power to do great things. The gift of faith nurtured in prayer and study and community and even in the greatest challenges in our lives.

Our gathering at the Table today acts out our faith experience. We don't have to have it all figured out. There is no magic. But we gather in community, we are nourished and fed by God's Spirit, we are graced by Christ's presence and gifts, we are blessed to move out into the world in God, for God. There IS a presence that we particularly celebrate in these moments which touches us deeply and lifts us to love and grace and hope and believing and serving.

Siblings in Christ, may we be affirmed in the faith which is gift to us today and every day. There is no faith shortage here. God has given us gifts to live our lives in strength and purpose and believing. In love and hope and peace. Empowered to bring these same gifts to others, for the transformation of the world.

To the glory of God. Amen.

[In case you're wondering about the second part of our morning's Gospel, I want just to say briefly that what may seem harsh and difficult to understand is a rather simple if demanding call to discipleship. Though not expressed as we might say something today (especially regarding slaves), the servant's faithfulness here is not an occasion for some special privilege or reward and there is the continuing expectation for discipleship, especially ordinary and daily practices of fidelity and service. [Greg Carey, RCL Commentary]]