

## Sermon for September 29, 2013

### Twentieth Sunday of Pentecost, Luke 17:5-10

BLESSINGS TO YOU AND PEACE FROM GOD THE FATHER, OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, AND THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

Faith is **so** simple. So **very, very** simple—sometimes. But when it comes to **preaching** on the subject of faith I have to tell you this was **not** an easy sermon to write. For Christians: faith is part of our foundation of **who** we are; yet, since it is one of those things which we cannot taste, feel, see, touch, or hear it is hard to qualify the **amount** of faith we have or if we even have **any** at all. In our world of judging the **quality** of this or that the **concept** of faith is something which is not always easy to grasp. It is **not** a commodity which can be measured. I feel sometimes it is **hard** for us to have faith in what we **can** see let alone what we **cannot** see. **What** is faith, **how** do we measure it, **where** does it come from, **how** can we tell when we have it or not, and just **how much** faith is enough anyway?

The other day as I was preparing for this sermon I decided to google the topic of 'faith stories'. It only took less than **1 second** to get **349 million** responses. I looked at a few of them. They ranged from stories about being **seriously ill**, to **financial** crisis, to finding faith through **love and forgiveness**. The stories I read all seemed to have a **'positive'** ending. **Faith in God had happily won out. YEAH!!!**

That brings up something that I have wanting to preach about for **quite** some time; because it is **easier** to preach about faith when everything is going good but what about when things are **not** going so good? How about the people we know and maybe even those right here in our own congregation who are **good** Christian people, who **pray** to God regularly, who do their **daily** devotions, who live what would be considered to be **faithful Godly** lives, and **yet**; despite all this—they have issues, concerns, and heavy burdens in their lives which cause them to **struggle** mightily. I, **myself**, have been in that situation. When I was younger there were times when I have thought—if I only had **more** faith maybe this or that would have or would **not** have happened. To be **honest** with you—sometimes I have lamented over my seemingly lack of faith in times of challenge.

Have you **ever** had a time when you were faced with an **incredible** obstacle or a burden **so** deep you thought you **might not** be able to bear it? Maybe you have thought, *“If I only would have had more faith everything would be alright.”* Or maybe, *“If only I would have had more faith my illness or my loved one’s illness would have been cured. If only I would have had more faith I would not be in the situation I am in right now.”* These are times when **you and I** face the mountains or have those **deeply rooted issues** in our lives that we would dearly **love** to see removed.

When I was a chaplain at St. Joseph's hospital I was called to be with a family whose 4 year old son nearly drown in a swimming pool. By the time I got to be with them they had decided to take him **off life support**. When I entered the room they were sitting around the bedside of this young boy **crying and asking** 'why, why did this happen to our son. We are good Christians. We pray, we go to church, we have a strong faith, what did we do wrong?'

What I want to say next **might** sound like a **radical** statement but, "**faith is not about us.**" Even though we have faith in God sad things **are** going to happen in our lives. Oh sure, we need to have faith in **God**, a faith in that which is **unseen**, a faith in the **mystery** of who God is, a faith in our **creeds and beliefs** of the church, but when it comes right down to it—faith **is not** about us. It is **all** about God. That is why Jesus says that we only need faith the size of a mustard seed. A mustard seed—something 1/20<sup>th</sup> of an inch long which when it is planted and matures **ultimately** can produce a tree that can grow to be 10 to 15 feet tall with **wide** branches that bend to the ground. When we have faith the size of a **tiny** mustard seed **God does the rest**. We don't need **more** faith—we need to **use** what we have.

Let me say this again—faith is not about us—what faith is about is a **deep inner knowing** that whatever we go through in this world God is with us. In good times and in bad. That is faith. Faith is **not** about reason and how we figure out if

we have **enough** of it or not. It cannot be **increased** by a whim. It is about God's grace, mercy, and love for us. Luther tells us that faith is to be understood **not** as knowledge but as **trust that consoles and encourages terrified minds**. We cannot **bottle** faith and we cannot **measure** it, but what we **can** do is trust that God is with us no matter what. That is faith in something **beyond** ourselves, faith in the **mystery** of who God is, and faith in that which is **unseen**—it is something that is **out** of our control. It is not an issue of need **'more'** faith but it is a matter of placing trust in God's ability not our own.

In our **gospel** reading for this morning the disciples asked Jesus to **increase** their faith because in the verses **just** preceding our lesson Jesus was **telling** them about sin which is bound to come to all, to watch themselves, and if someone repents of their sin they are to forgive them. The disciples **seemed** to believe that what they needed was **greater** faith than what they **currently** possessed. Jesus pointed out to them that even a **small bit** of faith, the size of a **tiny** mustard seed, would serve them. But even **more** important than the quantity was the **object** of that faith which is our **great and almighty God**.

When all is said and done when it comes to a life of faith: the faith that is enough is that which **trusts** in God's ability. Every week in the Lord's Prayer we say, "*thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*" If we **truly** believe those words we have enough faith to **sustain** us even when the burdens become more than we

**think** we can bear, even when we are faced with **illness** and **overwhelming** challenges whether they be financial, family, school, or whatever this world throws at you, and even when you think you have **nowhere** to turn for help. Have **faith** that our God who **loves** you is **with** you, at your side, and **loving** you no matter what the case. That is faith that **trusts and serves** God. That is **enough**. Faith does **not** run out, there is **no** expiration date, and there is **no limit** to how much you can have. *Faith is so simple; so very, very simple.* As always, **thanks** to be God who is **beside us** all the way whether we **realize** it or not. **AMEN.**