

Have a Little Faith
Psalm 137 Luke 17:5-10
World Communion Sunday October 6, 2019

I would like us all to take a moment to think about faith. How has faith been a part of your life? Are there incidents and times in your life when faith really carried you through? Do you consider yourself to be a person of faith? If faith is important to you, then how much faith do you need? How much faith is enough? The parable we read this morning, about having faith the size of a mustard seed is one I remember from my Sunday School days, and some of you might as well. It is one of those lessons that can really resonate with young minds because it is so easily demonstrated. I can't remember who gave it to me, but when I was a girl I had a necklace that had a little glass ball with a mustard seed suspended inside. It was meant to remind me of this parable, and to give me encouragement when I faced challenges; that even the tiniest bit of faith would be enough to help me get through whatever it was that I was dealing with.

Sometimes we beat ourselves up about faith. We say things like, "I don't have enough faith" without remembering that Jesus himself said we don't need *more faith*. According to Jesus, we just need the smallest amount of faith in order to make it through, in order to be God's faithful servants. When he speaks about servants being expected to work out in the fields and then serve at the table as well, he was referring to a common part of life during those days, using an example that most of his listeners would readily understand. A servant does what the master needs, and in a similar way, as God's servants, we are supposed to use the mustard seed of faith we have to do the work God expects and needs us to do.

Today is World Communion Sunday. It is a special day that began during a challenging time in world history, during the late 1930's and early 1940's. This was a time when the world was divided in what became a devastating world war. World Communion Sunday was begun in hope – looking for a time when barriers could be crossed and communities united. It was begun with the belief that faith, even the tiniest bit of faith, has the power to overcome even the most insurmountable of obstacles. Our other reading this morning, Psalm 137, refers to a rough time in Jewish history when the Temple has been destroyed and the Babylonians had made the Hebrew people into slaves. The psalmist, in grief and despair about all that has been lost, asks "How can we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?" And yet, isn't this exactly when we need to sing the Lord's song? Isn't this precisely when we need to remind ourselves, our friends and even our oppressors, that the Lord is with us? God has not abandoned us and never will, no matter what situation we find ourselves in.

The strange thing about faith, is that when it faces challenges, it becomes more honest. It becomes more powerful when we see and experience first hand that it really works. Faith becomes stronger and grows as it becomes more firmly rooted and grounded in experience, and in our lives. The more we lean on our faith, the stronger it becomes, and the more capable it is of really making a difference for good in the world and in our own lives. When we think we have our lives figured out and assume that we can manage just fine without asking God for help, we push our faith into the shadows. We set faith aside and try to work things out using our own strength. Sure, there is a certain satisfaction in being able to say that we did something entirely on our own, but it is a childish satisfaction. I liken it to watching a young child struggle defiantly to tie their own shoes or to zip their own jacket. There is a time and place to rely on one's own wits, and it can feel good to do it yourself; but most of the time we do better to depend on God for support and strength. Even those young children appreciate having a caring adult watch them and encourage them as they work on accomplishing those tasks.

As I sat around the table at Bible Study this week, it was encouraging to listen to stories of faith from the others who joined me there. Together we represented many years of faith and experience, and it was good to hear how faith had helped various people through the rough patches in their lives. It was wonderful to hear how different people had seen faith working in the lives of others, some of them saints who have passed on. This legacy of faith is a powerful thread that makes its way through generations of people. I have seen it to be true in every church or faith community of which I

have been a part. One person's faith influences and strengthens the faith of countless others. Oftentimes we don't even know when our faith influences someone else. To me this is an important part of what draws us together into faith communities. We support and depend on one another so that each of us can start with the tiniest mustard seed size faith and by being in community with one another this faith is enough for the circumstances of our lives because it is surrounded by the faith and love of others. This bit of faith that we bring to the table is just what we need to be the people of God in this time, in this place.

Today we celebrate World Communion Sunday, a day that honors our connection to Christians all over the world. It was begun in the hope that we could recognize what we have in common with one another, even though our countries might not always be friendly toward one another. It was begun with the prayer that ordinary Christians like you and like me would overrule the secular tendencies toward distrust and fear because we held to a stronger and more deeply rooted faith stance that said, "we are sisters and brothers in Christ." This attitude, this faith is something we would do well to lean on today when we read the headlines, when we listen to the news. And maybe, just maybe, the mustard seed bit of faith that each Christian from all over the world holds in their hearts will be enough to pave the way to mutual understanding. Maybe faith can prevail and remind us of our essential unity in Christ and we can build a world in which peace and justice prevail for all of God's children.

Loving God, our Father and the One in whom our faith rests, we pray to you for guidance today. We pray that the small fragment of faith that each of us carries in our hearts might shape our attitude toward one another both within this community and throughout the world. Help us see one another through the eyes of faith. Help us to see first of all, our essential unity in You, God, no matter how different our appearances or practices. May our faith change us and change the world as Jesus intended. It is in his name we pray, Amen.