



Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. **AMEN**

This week I did some research on what the average American said they needed in their life. I found a 1991 Gallup Poll survey that said that food and shelter, community, sense of purpose and faith topped the list. Wanting to find something a bit more up to date, I started looking for what Americans feel they need today outside of the basics. I found surveys done that said people wanted happiness, money, freedom, joy, balance, fulfillment, and confidence. I did not come across any that mentioned faith in something bigger than ourselves.

Maybe, if I did the survey of what you think are the most important “needs” in life I would get a different answer. Maybe I am preaching to the choir.

I think we all realize that our basic human needs found in Maslow’s hierarchy need to be met before anything else can be considered. Food, shelter, water, clothing are necessities before we can expand our list. Next, there is a need for community or a sense of belonging that comes from intimacy with another human. Humans do need a sense of purpose, so life has meaning, a reason to get out of bed in the morning. And I do believe that we need to have faith, faith in something or someone larger than ourselves. We want to know that there is a Grand Designer of the universe, someone who is still in control, still in charge. And the one thing that I do see our world lacking today is faith in God, because without faith there can be no joy, no hope, and no future.

In our Gospel text for today, the disciples ask Jesus, “Increase our faith!” I would suspect that that request resonates with most of us. I know it does with me. Whether it is guilt that sometimes think I don’t have enough faith, or my faith is too weak, I want more. More faith would help me to be a better Christian and lead a more pleasing life to God.

And so interesting on how Jesus responds. He tells the apostles that faith is not a matter of magnitude. Even with a mustard seed size faith you can accomplish monumental things.

Faith, folks does not need to be big in order to be effective. We don't need a seminary degree, or to go on several mission trips, or have total recall of Biblical passages, to have a capable faith.

In our reading from 2 Timothy, we get some clarification, where this faith comes from. Paul, writing to Timothy, reminds him that his faith comes from believers in Christ, even though they were once Gentiles. Both his mother and his grandmother, Eunice and Lois were converts to Christianity and faith lived in them just as it does in Timothy. He learned this faith early in life at this mother's knee and around the dinner table. This seed of faith was planted in Timothy at a young age. I do find this a great reminder that our goal does not have to be a huge faith that is esoteric. But rather we should want to stay in touch with the essence of our faith, the faith we first received as a child.

Not sure if you have heard this story or not. Karl Barth is one of the greatest theologians of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He was a very learned Biblical scholar and wrote volumes on theology. One day when he was an old man, Barth spoke at the University of Chicago. At the end of his presentation, he took questions from the audience. One person asked him. "Dr Barth, if you could distill your theology into one sentence, what would it be?" That's a tall order Barth replied, "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so."

You see Barth was a giant in Biblical knowledge, but the mustard seed center of his faith traced back to the elements he first discovered in his childhood. You might even say that his faith had not expanded one bit. Remember Jesus once said that "Anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." It is with the trust of a child, a complete and perfect confidence that faith is at it's best. It is impossible to increase our faith beyond this fundamental, mustard seed center. And the size of faith does not matter. You see, faith is a God thing. The size of faith does not matter because God is the one doing the action.

What I mean is that we have a lesson here from Jesus about moving mountains. Our world tells us that if faith moved the mountain, then the bigger the mountain the more faith I would need to move it. The bigger the obstacle the more strength I'd need to climb it. The more serious the illness, a faith even greater would be required to overcome it. The more serious the sin, the more faith I would need in order to have it forgiven. Well folks, that kind of thinking makes sense in the world today, but it is not how faith works. In fact, let's be clear, it is not our faith that does the work at all. That is way above my pay grade. It is God that works through our faith.

Think of it this way. How many of you have a ring of keys. One key for each lock you have to unlock. A round key does not fit into a square hole, so to speak. Think of faith as the key that opens the door to God acting in our lives. If you have a bigger key ring, with more keys on it, that does not matter. The key ring does not open the door, but rather it is one of the keys that opens the door. So even a little faith opens the door for God to move the mountains and tress and even our hearts.

And so, Jesus reminds the disciples that even a little bit of faith, faith of a child can do great things. It can grasp what God is doing in our lives. Even a tiny bit of faith can help us recognize the ways that God is able to make changes in our lives and those around us. And

so, we too do not need to have our faith increased. We have faith and even our mustard seed size faith can still do great things through us. Remember the famous line from Philippians 4:13, "I can do all things through Christ, who strengthens me." So, if our faith in Christ is centered, no matter how big or small, we have what is needed. I know that sometimes it does not seem like we have enough faith because life seems to be crashing down around us. Things go badly with our health, our family, and our self-worth. Thank God that He has given us faith in His only Son that even though it might seem as small as a seed, our sins are forgiven, and He wants for us an abundant life here on earth and eternal life for us in heaven one day.

So, I hope that this week you will give some thought as to where your faith was first kindled. On your mother's knee, in Sunday school singing "Jesus, Loves Me", at the baptismal font, during VBS or church camp or at the Lord's table. Wherever your mustard seed was first sown remember it is still your faith, active and alive. In fact, I probably should have used the example of a muscle instead of a key because faith is active and wants and needs to be used. Faith is strengthened by action. Here is a list I came across this week by a pastor Mary Erickson, on ways to strengthen our faith.

We flex our faith muscle every time we pray, and when we forgive others. Our faith is strengthened when we help the neighbors God has placed before us, when we share of our wealth to help others in need. Our faith grows every time we are confronted with making a decision without knowing the outcome, but only trust that the hand of God goes with us along the meandering path. We use our faith muscle when we practice hospitality to the stranger. When we choose to bless and not curse, faith is strengthened. When we sing a song to the Lord, when we gather in worship, faith is refreshed. When we carry on, even in weariness, especially in weariness, because this task is our calling, faith is strengthened. Faith is realized in acts of faithfulness. And after we have done them, we discover that we have grown, and our faith has increased. So, exercise your mustard seed faith and you will be amazed at what you can do with faith in Christ. Even a little faith can uproot trees and move mountains and bring us to eternal life. **AMEN**