

Pastor Mollie's Sermon
October 6, 2019
Luke 17:5-10

Through each and every day we are constantly quantifying.
We are calculating the time it will take to get to work
We are negotiating our schedules to fit in all we can into our 24 hour days
Working with our budgets
Tracking grade point averages
Counting the years of experience between co-workers, friends, and family.
We are always in a state of quantifying
Less Than... More than....
And today our Gospel lesson is no different.
Let's try something:

Line up Oldest to youngest (Who has the most faith?)

One would maybe think the oldest due to more years of experience, more time to strengthen your faith, learn, and grow.

Although some may say the youngest, "Faith like a child" perhaps- a faith that has not yet experienced the harsh truths of this world.

Do Pastors have more faith than members of the church? How about someone who is not a member of a church? Who has "the most faith?"

(Members can Sit down)

In our Gospel for this morning, the disciples make what seems a perfectly reasonable request:
Give us more faith!

They think faith is something they can quantify and they just want more of it.

And Jesus gives them a stinging reply.

We can sympathize with their confusion.

For chapter after chapter of Luke, Jesus has been challenging them to embrace some extremely radical concepts.

This journeyman carpenter tells them that he and the Father are one;

that they must change their hearts or perish;

that they cannot serve God and wealth;

that they must forgive and forgive again... and on and on... one tough nut after another.

No wonder they ask: Give us more faith!

On the surface, Christ's response is something between a challenge and a put-down.

He tells them: If your faith were the size of a mustard seed,

you would already have all the power you need to perform tremendous feats.

The operative word here is If.

By definition "if" makes every subsequent statement conditional.

It questions whether they have even the smallest measure of faith.

However, an alternate translation of the original 1st Century Greek puts Christ's remarks into a very different light.

In addition to "if," the Greek word "ei" was also commonly translated as "since."

And what a difference a single word can make.

Instead of scolding the disciples for a total lack of faith,

this construction recognizes that the disciples' faith, while minuscule, could still be very powerful... if only they would use it.

Jesus has called the disciples and they have followed.

They will go on to survive betrayal and despair.

By the power of the Holy Spirit, they will carry their fragile faith to the corners of the known world.

And on the way, as they exercise their faith, it will become more and more robust... so much so that will follow Jesus to martyrs' deaths.

In this gospel, Jesus is telling the disciples to trust him.

They have all the proof they need. Don't ask for more. Use the faith you have.

It is in this sense, we may feel a lot like these disciples:

Overwhelmed by the demands we feel placed on us to be "good Christians," not sure we are up to the task,

and wondering what we signed on for.

But Jesus message is to remind us that faith doesn't have to be heroic.

Faith, as Jesus describes it, is doing your job,

doing your duty,

not because of any sense of reward but simply because it needs doing.

even the simplest things done in faith can have a huge impact:

Faith, isn't an idea, it's a muscle. And the more we use that muscle, the stronger it gets.

And so Jesus tells his disciples -- both then and now --

that we've got all that we need to be faithful,

and that being faithful, finally, is about recognizing all the God-given opportunities just to show up and do what needs to be done.

I have something for each of you to take with you today, to help grasp the concept of our faith.

I have here some playdoh.

Playdoh is used to mold, to shape, to stretch and to create.

You will get to take your own container home with you today

If you think of faith like this playdoh-

Everyone has some- everyone has the same "amount"

But it looks different for each person who holds it.

for some... maybe it is molded flat but with a large surface area

Maybe for some it is balled up

Our faith is our own, and we are called to use it, to mold it, to shape it.

Like a muscle, like this playdoh, we need to use it.

If playdoh doesn't get used and sits out... what happens?

It dries up.

But just as we are reminded of our baptisms each day,

A little water can perk this playdoh back up, and ready to use and mold once again.

That is Christ's message to us today.

We are here for one reason... to be an active witness to Christ's love in the world; loving God; serving neighbor.

As professor Kathrine Schifferdecker puts it: "We were never meant to be couch-potato Christians, sitting on the cushion of our Baptism, asking Jesus for a fresh order of deep-fried faith before we deign to stir ourselves to follow him."

Faith is our reaction to God's grace.

In Baptism we get a life supply of that grace...

but it is up to us to use it, like a muscle...

In this gospel Jesus tells us we were meant to grow it, to show it, to share it. We must use it.

This is everyday faith-- the ordinary, extraordinary faith that we're invited to practice day in and day out.

It's not heroic, but it is essential.

Your faith is personal but never private.

In all the good work we do, inspired by God's grace, we're not negotiating for an upgrade on our ticket to heaven.

We're not demanding frequent flier miles.

Faith in action is enough... a Faith small as a mustard seed, yet powerful enough to perform wonders...

a Faith great enough to change the course of history, yet humble enough to kneel and to serve.

It's a confident, comforting Faith we have... a blessed assurance that in the face of every trouble... God's grace will lead us.

Amen