

“Frustrated by Their Lack of Faith”

Date: July 5, 2015

Place: Lakewood UMC

Text: Mark 6:1-6

Theme: Trust, Faith, Doubt

Occasion: Pentecost 6, Year B; Independence Day

The Fourth of July makes us conscious of our roots. Have you ever thought about what a leap of faith it was for Columbus to embark on his great adventure across the Atlantic Ocean? Do you not marvel at his perseverance and his commitment to the dream?

I read somewhere that the average speed of the Santa Maria during the voyage across the Atlantic was two miles an hour. Yet we get frustrated when we have to slow down to 30 MPH in traffic. Do you wonder why his crew became almost mutinous at times? Do you see how frustrated Columbus must have been with *their* lack of faith?

Our founding fathers faced the same type of frustration. The Declaration of Independence was not entirely popular. If Gallup had taken a poll back then, it would have shown that a fairly sizeable number of the early fathers and mothers thought it would be suicide to defy the British Empire. The faith of Washington, Jefferson, Franklin and others is even more thrilling when viewed in that light.

Then there was Francis Scott Key, detained aboard a British ship while Fort McHenry was being bombarded. All night long the British gunships pounded the shoreline. But the morning broke and Key saw “by dawn’s early light the star-spangled banner yet waving.”

In the last verse of the anthem he wrote, which we almost never sing, he wrote these words: ‘Then conquer we must, when our cause is just. And this is our motto, ‘In God we trust.’”

That was the faith of the men and women who launched this free land. But their faith was not universally shared. There were among them Tories, who did not want to oppose the British. How frustrating for those who wanted independence.

Jesus knew how it felt to be frustrated by people's lack of faith. His disciples were with him. It was the Sabbath day in his hometown of Nazareth and he was teaching in the synagogue. His friends and neighbors were astonished. "Isn't this Jesus, the carpenter, who is teaching?"

"Isn't he the son of Mary, the brother of James and Joseph and Judah and Simon? Aren't these his sisters here with us?" They knew him. They knew his family. Mark tells us they were offended by him. It is here that Jesus spoke those well-known, often-quoted words:

"A prophet is not without honor, except in his own country and among his own kin." How true that is. Notice especially verse five. It says, "And he could do no mighty work, save that he laid hands on a few sick people and healed them." Even Jesus could not do mighty work when people did not believe!

Verse six says, "And he marveled because of their unbelief." Jesus marveled at unbelief, and he was frustrated by those who had no faith. He was stymied by those who refused to have any faith at all. Now we need to stop here and simply acknowledge that there are two kinds of faith – head-faith and heart-faith.

Head-faith is intellectual assent. We agree to certain ideas. We listen to the arguments for the existence of God, and we agree. Sure there must be a supreme being, a creator of the universe.

But faith in Christ is more than intellectual assent. It is believing with the heart and with the will, with adoration and with action. To have faith in Christ goes beyond saying, “Yeah, I believe,” to saying, “I trust him with my life.”

Years ago a party of visitors at the national mint were told by a workman in the smelting works that if you first dipped your hand in water, a ladle of molten metal could be poured over the palm of your hand without burning it.

A husband and wife were part of this party of visitors. “Perhaps you would like to try it,” the workman said to the husband. “No thanks,” said the husband, “I’ll take your word for it.” The workman turned to the wife, “Perhaps you would like to try it.”

“Sure,” said the wife. She pulled up the sleeve of her blouse and thrust her hand into a bucket of water. Calmly she held out her hand while the hot metal was poured over it. And she wasn’t burned.

In the nature of Jesus’ parables, we might ask which of the two really believed the workman. The husband believed at one level, but wasn’t willing to put his belief to the test. The wife, on the other hand, was willing to take the kind of risk that faith in Christ demands.

There were many back in the day of Jesus, who witnessed the Master perform miracles, but only a few of them entrusted their lives to him. And so it is today. We believe, but only superficially.

We believe only enough to keep us relatively decent people, but not enough to make us true disciples. If somebody asked, we would probably say that Jesus is the Savior of the world. But the truth of the matter is - some of us are not even certain he has the power to save us. He must be deeply frustrated by our lack of faith.

Now I do need to say, there are times in each of our lives, when we go through periods of questioning. Our faith is in search of answers. Deeply held beliefs are put to the test. Things that we once held dear no longer seem as certain.

Please hear me today. I am not judging those who are struggling to find answers to their questions about the faith. On the other hand, there are those who will use their questions as a reason *not* to make the leap of faith.

Through the work of the Holy Spirit, God brings each person to a moment of decision. In the end, we each must decide whether we will make the leap of faith, and give ourselves completely to Christ.

St. Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 12:9, “God said unto me, ‘My grace is sufficient for thee.’” And yet, what a hard thing that is for many to accept. God wants to empower our lives, God wants to give us an abundant life and God wants to give us eternal life. Yet many of us are still holding back. “Well, I don’t know.....”

We are a bit like the old man riding down the road on a donkey, while he carried a 200 pound sack of wheat on his shoulder. Someone asked him why he didn’t take the weight off his back and strap it to the donkey. “Oh, no!” he protested. “I couldn’t ask the donkey to carry all of that weight.”

Many of us are carrying burdens that we don’t have to carry. Only our lack of faith keeps us in bondage. Only our lack of confidence that God is able to relieve us of our burdens causes us to carry weight that we should be laying down. God is able, if we trust. How frustrated Christ be with our lack of faith.