

The Rev. Emily Dunevant

Luke 17:5-10

Habakkuk 1:1-4,2:1-4

Psalm 37:1-9

2 Timothy 1:1-14

October 6, 2019

The Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost

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Some days, I wish I had a bag full of mustard seeds. You know the days...when your faith is fading, when you are struggling with your purpose or self-worth, when you aren't sure if God is even there. You want to yell out...hey, God! Here I am. Right here. Help me out already! That's when I wish I had those mustard seeds...those little glimmers of hope and assurance that maybe, just maybe, things aren't quite as bad as I have made them out to be.

It's the same for the disciples in our Gospel reading when they call out to Jesus, "Increase our faith." Come on, Jesus! Just give us a little boost, a little spiritual pick me up. We need to feel it and know it.

I imagine the disciples knowing there is more, that they should feel more, be more. And, in their moment of realization, realizing that their faith has some holes, they begin to worry. They want to be better so they call out for the one thing they know is critical for their sense of self....faith.

It made me realize that we all have holes. Holes in our perceptions. Holes in our understanding. Holes in our strength and courage. It's the moment when we see that we aren't doing as much as we would like, or we aren't meeting all of the goals we had set for ourselves and we want more. But, I would argue, that asking for more faith isn't selfish. I don't think the disciples are trying to meet some external goal of goodness. They simply realize that they can live into their calling more fully if only Jesus gave them more of the skills to do so.

So, they name what they think they lack. Give us more faith.

But, Jesus stops them. He wants them to know one thing...they already have what they need. Their faith is already sufficient, even if they feel it's full of holes. Surely, it was a shocking truth to hear. How could their faith be enough just as it was?

When I was training to be a yoga instructor 17 years ago, we had a lesson that was repeated to us over and over again. The lesson was simply, "All that you need is already within you." In a sense, that is what Jesus is saying also...you are doing fine. Your faith is just as it should be. It is already within you.

But, faith can be fickle. At least it feels that way. We ebb and flow. Sometimes we feel strong and sometimes we feel weak. Sometimes we feel we are living into our faith with arms wide open and at other times we become fearful and pull inward not willing to open ourselves to possibility of God's call in our lives. We question. We challenge. We doubt. And in those times, we wonder, how in the world can our faith as insufficient as it may feel, actually be enough?

I want you to hear the words of C.S. Lewis, from his book *Mere Christianity*, as he describes this inner struggle.

*“...Christ offers something for nothing: He even offers everything for nothing. In a sense, the whole Christian life consists in accepting that very remarkable offer. But the difficulty is to reach the point of recognizing that all we have done and can do is nothing....handing everything over to Christ does not, of course, mean that you stop trying. To trust Him means, of course, trying to do all that He says....Thus if you have really handed yourself over to Him, it must follow that you are trying to obey Him. But trying in a new way, a less worried way. Not doing these things in order to be saved, but because He has begun to save you already.”*

In other words, faith isn't a listing of facts and figures and achievements. It isn't a check list of how good we are or how many nice things we did for someone else. Faith is the orientation of our soul. It's there and it is good.

That's the mustard seed. The glimmer of hope in God, in a God that transforms and saves, a God that heals and reveals. It's the little steps we take that say over and over again, God, I am going to trust in you to work within me, even when I don't feel strong, even when I don't feel confident, even when I doubt. So, I am going to put one foot in front of the other in the only way I know how and I am going to trust that that is sufficient.

The mustard seed reminds us that God holds us close even we don't feel so close to God. So, let those mustard seeds rain down upon you in glorious abundance and accept these little glimpses of God as your reminder that hope and love and goodness are always available to you. In fact, they are already there.

Dennis Sanders, a Disciples of Christ pastor from Minnesota wrote,

*“God doesn't need us to believe enough. God calls us to be faithful—to seek to do God's work in the world. Faithfulness is about being a witness to the grace and mercy of Jesus; it is about trusting in God's faithfulness to us even when our faith is wavering. We are faithful when we proclaim the good news and do acts of compassion, even on those days when our faith seems small.”*

Thanks be to God. Amen.