



Tiny Faith – Touchpoint for September 28, 2022

Luke 17:5-10 (NRSVUE) ⁵ The apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our faith!” ⁶ The Lord replied, “If you had faith the size of a mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and it would obey you.

TOUCH POINT

⁷ “Who among you would say to your slave who has just come in from plowing or tending sheep in the field, ‘Come here at once and take your place at the table?’ ⁸ Would you not rather say to him, ‘Prepare supper for me, put on your apron and serve me while I eat and drink; later you may eat and drink?’ ⁹ Do you thank the slave for doing what was commanded? ¹⁰ So you also, when you have done all that you were ordered to do, say, ‘We are worthless slaves; we have done only what we ought to have done!’”

Grace and Peace from the Mystery in whom we live and move and have our being.

“And the apostles said to the Lord, ‘Increase our faith!’”

Oh, what I would have given to have people, in the churches I served, who were like the apostles.

Those who wanted to increase their faith. Show up at every Bible study. Every worship. Sit on every committee and be involved in every activity. You know, the strivers. The competitors. The ones always wanting more. The ones who wanted to make sure they were better today than they were yesterday.

Oh, what I would have given to have people, in the churches I served, who were like the apostles.

And apparently, I was way off base.

“If you had faith the size of a mustard seed...”

What pastor wants a parishioner like that! That’s what I always complained about. The puny faith of my flock.

Now just so you know, a mustard seed isn’t very big. It is rather tiny. And the point of all this is that there isn’t more or less when it comes to faith. There isn’t an increasing or decreasing when it comes to faith. In fact, the point of all this is that faith is kind of irrelevant. It can even be the size of a mustard seed. Because you see, it isn’t your faith that matters, but where your faith is located. In whom is it located. In whom is it found.

Luke has been warning us about putting one’s faith in wealth and riches as opposed to in God. And by the way, when you read Luke talking about wealth and riches, change those words to the phrase ‘Standard of Living’ or ‘Status Quo.’ In other words, you can’t worship God and your standard of living... or, you can’t worship God and the status quo. Changing those words makes a difference.

Anyway, back to the bible passage.

“Lord, increase OUR faith.”

I’m sorry, but it ISN’T YOUR faith to begin with.

“Faith comes from what is heard,” Paul writes in Romans. And Luther, in his explanation of the third article of the Apostle’s creed, writes, “I believe I cannot by my own wisdom or strength, believe in Jesus Christ or come to Him. But the Holy Spirit has called, gathered, and enlightened me.”

I’m sorry, but YOUR faith WAS NEVER YOURS to begin with.

“Lord, increase MY faith!” we cry out. And Jesus responds, “Get over yourselves. It’s not about you.”

Quit acting like a slave who thinks they deserve to sit at the table, or can work their way up to it. Quit trying to take a bite out of the apple so you can be god-like.

Luther had another great quote that I think applies here: “The Christian who keeps constantly checking on how they are doing ceases to be a Christian.”

This is what it means to live by grace... that we don’t need to constantly be worried about how we are doing.

Quit worrying about yourself and get on with living as a responsible steward of this world – or as a slave to Christ as St. Paul would say. Stay in your lane.

If grace is at the foundation of life – of existence – then why are we striving? If Jesus is the Savior of the world, then quit trying to save yourself or climb some spiritual ladder.

You know, as Christians, we say Jesus is the Savior of the world. But I think deep down, most of us believe he only did a half-way job. That’s why we have to go out and SAVE OTHERS. Because apparently Jesus didn’t get it right the first time.

Or we keep checking on ourselves to make sure we are measuring up, checking all the boxes... just in case Jesus didn’t cover all the bases.

But apparently Jesus doesn’t have any time for such nonsense.

So, what do we do with a text that slams our desire for greater faith? This passage stops us dead in our tracks... which is maybe the whole point.

We’ve been going about it the wrong way. We’ve been in a passageway that simply circles our navels as we constantly gaze at how we are doing. When instead, what we need is a bible passage that takes us to a new place. A passage that brings about a death and resurrection.

You know, it’s a good thing I’m not a pastor at a regular church anymore. I don’t think the members would appreciate me standing up and saying, “Hey, come to our church – we won’t increase your faith!”

Which brings up the whole question of: “Why then, even go? If it’s not to increase my faith, what is the point?”

Let me try this one out for you...

Why do I HAVE to go to church?

I HAVE TO GO to hear that I DON’T HAVE TO DO anything. That I belong. That I am accepted. That I am forgiven, saved, justified... however you want to describe it. I am all of those things without having to pass through a faith-o-meter detector to prove I am worthy.

I go to have grace hammered into me, or at least poured down my throat and given something to chew on.

I go to hear that it’s ok to “get over myself,” as painful and difficult as that may be. Because I WANT IT TO BE ABOUT ME!

I go to hear that I have freedom FROM crying out, “Lord, increase my faith!”

And I have freedom FOR living and loving my neighbor AS MYSELF.

And it is only in the dying to that narcissistic self that I can be resurrected to my true humanity... as a member of the body of Christ, which is the entire universe.

It is only in hearing that I don't need to increase my faith, that I can begin to live for others, as a servant or slave to all... which was the original command of God to humanity in the Garden of Eden: *"Be fruitful and multiply and care for the earth."*

In other words, be life-giving in all that you do. In relationship to others and the earth and all its inhabitants.

"Lord, increase my faith!"

And Jesus replies, *"No thank you. I have greater plans for you than that."*

Kind of like this meal, don't you think?

I mean, if ever there were people who needed an increase in faith that night, it was Peter, and Judas, and Thomas, and the rest. These guys are poster children for disciples who need more faith.

My faith looks rather substantial compared to theirs on this night.

Certainly, Jesus would give them a needed pep talk this evening. Certainly, he would motivate them to greater heights of faith. I would have been more than willing to hand him one of my sermons.

But alas, he has other plans for them. He is going to turn them into his body and blood.

They are going to be witnesses – of his grace, of his forgiveness.

They are **not** going to be witnesses to **their** great faith, but witnesses to the faithfulness of **the One** who feeds us in our doubts... who befriends us in our betrayals... who forgives us in our rejection, even from the cross.

"Lord, increase our faith!" we cry.

"No thank you," Jesus replies. *"I've got bigger plans for you. You're going to be my body and blood in the world."*

Amen.

Spirit in the Desert

Opening Song

Be Still

(London Fox Taize Choir)

Be Still, know that I am God.

Calm Me Lord

(Margaret Rizza)

Calm me Lord as you calmed the storm.

Still me Lord, keep me from harm.

Let all the tumult within me cease.

Enfold me Lord, in your peace.

Bible Passage

(A passage takes us from one place to another)

Touchpoint

(Where God's story touches our life story)

Healer of Our Every Ill

(Marty Haugen)

Healer of our every ill, light of each tomorrow.

Give us peace beyond our fear, and hope beyond our sorrow.

You who know our fears and sadness. Grace us with your peace and gladness.

Spirit of all comfort, fill our hearts. *Refrain*

In the pain and joy beholding, how your grace is still unfolding

Give us all your vision God of love. *Refrain*

The Meal

The Lord's Prayer

(Monastery Choir of St. John of San Francisco)

Benediction

Gaelic Blessing/Deep Peace

(John Rutter, The Cambridge Singers)

Deep peace of the running wave to you. Deep peace of the flowing air to you.

Deep peace of the quiet earth to you. Deep peace of the shining stars to you.

Deep peace of the gentle night to you. Moon and stars pour their healing light on you.

Deep peace of Christ, of Christ the light of the world to you.

Deep peace of Christ to you.