

Faith the Size of a Mustard Seed
Psalm 137: 1-8 Luke 17: 5-10
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October 2, 2016

Won't you please pray with me. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

This morning our scriptures bring us to the subject of faith, in fact what a mustard seed faith might look like. Across the past few weeks, we have considered how we choose to live as individuals and as the church gathered, - even as geese - but today we are coming to the subject of how we live - through the eyes and heart of our faith - and through the highs and lows of our lives.

Our scripture lessons draw us this way, and it is interesting, as we prepare to celebrate World Communion Sunday, that we as sisters and brothers around this fragile planet, are gathering as well, around these lessons on the subject of faith. And you can just imagine the many different contexts Christians worldwide are experiencing - war and peace, hunger and full harvests, hurricanes and droughts, fear and confidence, illness and good health. These experiences we know as fellow humans reach out in every direction - calling us to be brave, to love our neighbor, and to love and trust our God.

However, if you think about it, somehow, the experience of loving is better understood, I think, than that of having faith and trusting in God. We love and care for each other in all the contexts of our lives. But where and how does faith enter into all of this?

Our scripture lessons for today pose a very human question about faith? Will there be enough? Will we have faith enough to get us through the hard times in our lives? Do we trust God enough to lead us through the dark places in our lives? After all, what do we think - about our own faith - do we dare trust it? Have we had life experiences where God has provided what we need - to go on?

So we begin with questions. Psalm 137 brings us into a time far back in the past when Israel was in exile. There Israel was, on the shores of the rivers of Babylon, weeping as she remembered her time in Zion. There the Israelites were, being taunted by their captors, who asked them to sing one of the songs of Zion. They asked - or may have wondered - how could they sing the Lord's song in a foreign land - an experience that heightened the emotions and pain of being in exile. Yet at the same time, I would ask - and you might ask - choir - how could they not? The love and deep joy of their faith, and their holy land was not something that a journey away could remove from them. At the same time, neither was their grief something

that could be taken away. And we heard, there was anger at their captors also in the mix. There they were – in pain, needing their God to help them – and God was right there, sharing their pain, but the question arises, did they have enough faith to realize that they – even in exile – were still being loved by their God and led through this time. And I wonder, what is enough faith?

Here, Joel Smeby, a Lutheran pastor in Minnesota has observed and concluded, that “There was no singing, but hope was alive by the waters of Babylon. “Hope was alive. Faith, however challenged, was still alive.

Which brings us to our lesson from Luke’s gospel, where Jesus taught about faith, faith the size of a mustard seed,

As you may have noticed, in our reading for today from Luke’s gospel, we find the disciples, who knew that following Jesus was not a simple task, calling upon him and crying out “Increase our faith!” How Jesus had his patience challenged by his disciples, challenged by their belief that faith was but a commodity. believing that it needed to be larger so as to sustain them through hard times. Believing that their faith, as it was, was not great enough to sustain them through hard times.

And how does Jesus respond? He replies, “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.’” How do we hear this teaching? That faith, however small, is enough to bring us through our hard times, our times in exile? Perhaps that faith is not something which can be assigned a size? Who speaks of great faith? Or little faith? And learning that it is this not so much the size of our faith, as it is our willingness or daring to really rely upon our God. And I would also add, that having faith is not a function of age, is not reliant upon how old we are. And there is no special knowledge that needs to be acquired.

In his response to his disciples’ questions, Jesus chose the image of mustard seeds. He also referred to the kingdom of heaven as being like a grain of mustard seed. Why that choice? After all, what is so special about mustard seeds? Let’s consider what we know about mustard seeds. First of all, they are very small. In my research I learned that about a farmer who planted some grain. The seed sacks said they were 99 percent grain, and 1 % other seeds. He had no idea the 1% were mustard seeds. And when he went to harvest his field he was shocked. The 1% mustard seeds - had taken over the field. The farmer also looked into this seed and it was hard to get rid of. He learned from the Encyclopedia Britannica that it grows in every place in the world...in cold climates as well as hot ones. It can grow in any type of soil. It is disease resistant and hardy. In short, never underestimate mustard seeds.

So we have the mustard seed – which when planted, grows with persistence. Now I’d like to take us back to those “of little faith”, actually those who have not dared

fully trust in God. In particular, I find myself drawn to the story of the Disciple, Doubting Thomas. Perhaps he has come to mind for you as well.

Thomas was a loyal follower of Jesus, a true disciple, who supported Jesus and was willing to defend him whenever needed, come what may. Easy – as long as Jesus was with them, courageously living his faith. Then this man Jesus, whom Thomas loved, was arrested, and did not help himself. He was convicted of blasphemy and sent to be crucified. Here we enter into parts of Jesus' life that are beyond our understanding. He died for us – and rose again on the third day. His resurrection has been the cornerstone of our faith our hope in our God, and our belief that death is not the final word. Jesus' resurrection was his triumph. And he came back to the disciples to be sure they understood that he had indeed risen. But Thomas wasn't there. And (pay attention here) without seeing and hearing for himself, without putting his hands into Jesus' wounds, Thomas could not believe.

And what happened? A week later, Jesus appeared to his disciples and Thomas believed. And that is key for me. Jesus knew that Thomas could not believe without seeing for himself, and Jesus found a way to come to Thomas who wanted to believe, but was having trouble.

If we want to have faith in God, in Jesus his son, and in the Holy Spirit, wishing to believe, but needing Jesus somehow to come to us. even in the midst of our doubts – that is enough – for that faith, the size of a mustard seed, with God's help, can and will take root and grow – tenaciously. Young or old, rich or poor, college educated, or not. God knows our strengths and our weak places, and will do whatever we need to help us come to our God who loves us fiercely and would care for us throughout all our days. Friends, let us at least wonder in the midst of our doubts. And finding our faith, let it not be a point of pride. Rather let us be humble. Let us be like the servants in the field who worked through the day, and then again into the night, to provide a meal – to serve their God.

Our meal is before us. We, like our brothers and sister's world-around, have gathered and prepared the joyful feast of our Lord, where all are welcome, welcome to learn of and receive God's love and care. God's meal awaits, it is a meal which will sustain us as we go forth to love and serve this world, to love and serve our God. Amen.