

⁵The apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our faith!” ⁶The 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.

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’? ⁸Would 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’? ⁹Do you thank the slave for doing what was commanded? ¹⁰So 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!’ ”

Luke 17:5-10

Sermon for Sunday, October 2nd, 2022 (from Luke’s gospel above)

You no doubt have heard the expression, “Don’t overthink this.” Maybe you’ve said it to someone you know – a friend or colleague maybe, or a loved one perhaps. Or maybe someone else said it to you. I know I get that all the time, “Don’t overthink this”, referring to my incessant need to get the whole story from every possible angle.

In some ways I hear this in the words of Jesus in our gospel today when he tells the disciples to basically “chill” when they ask him how to get more faith. But the disciples, who have been with Jesus throughout his brief ministry, and maybe seeing Jesus do his thing, that is healing, teaching, connecting with people in the way that he does, think perhaps that they to want what he’s got. Maybe they want a piece of this healing and teaching thing that they see in Jesus.

Maybe they look at themselves and see only poor fishermen, with limited skills and abilities to minister to others. Men who don’t have the power to raise the dead like Jesus or teach, or heal. Or maybe they’re just not good with dealing with the kind of crowds that Jesus deals with every day - prostitutes, orphans, the sick and lame, the disenfranchised, the down and outers of the world, and others. And so I can understand why they see all of this in Jesus and say to themselves, “I want what he’s got.” And then ask him to give it to them. Can’t you?

And so they ask Jesus to increase their faith - increase their faith so that they can be more like Jesus. And I completely get that. You would too probably if you were one of his inner circle. You probably would have asked for the same thing had you been around Jesus during his ministry.

“If only”, we think. If only I had more faith (what does that even mean, by the way?); more belief in the power of God; more knowledge of Scripture; more trust that God is God. If only I had more faith, my Christian life would be more complete, more rewarding, more fulfilling, more meaningful or productive and on and on. Sound familiar?

I’ve been at the bedside of the sick and dying, and others going through divorce or other life altering situations, and people ask with some regularity, “Pastor, if only I had more faith”, or

“How do I get more faith, pastor”? People, baptized and raised in the faith, who when challenged as we all are at some point in our lives, questioning if whatever faith they feel they have is enough to get them through whatever circumstance they may be facing. Thinking, if only they had more faith, they'd be better Christians, or better people, or more secure in their place in the heavenly realm and so on.

Now I might not say the following to someone on their deathbed who is challenging me with this thought - although I may. But, here's my answer to the question of how do I get more faith. Maybe the first step in having more faith is not wanting more faith to begin with. That's right. What can I possibly mean by that answer?

The world has told us that we can always do better. That we can always be better. That we're never good enough. Strive harder. Achieve more. Success is defined by how much work and effort we put into something. The harder I work, the more reward I receive. Right? We always want more, more time, you name it. What we have now is never enough. So the same ethic applies to everything else in our life so why not our faith? If only we prayed more, or attended church more, or did more good deeds, or studied the Bible more, then our faith would multiply, whatever that even means. Our faith would be... ”greater”.

But, what does Jesus tell us - the weak and the timid? What does Jesus tell us regular folks with wobbly knees when it comes to the faith thing? Jesus tells us (paraphrasing), “Child of God, even faith the size of a mustard seed, the tiniest faith, the faith which God gives us to begin with, will give you the power to perform great things, to do great works, not because we're all amazing on our own, but because it is God through the power of the Holy Spirit working great things in and through us. It is God in Jesus Christ, who will provide – it is God in Christ who will lead and guide you.”

Faith is not something we can gain, or earn, or achieve, or get more of through doing something. Instead, faith is something that we are given by God. We didn't earn it. It's not a reward, or a prize for something we did. It's not a degree program we can earn at a seminary somewhere. I don't have a Ph.D. in faith. My faith isn't greater than anyone else's just because I have a seminary degree.

Whatever faith you have now, was given to you as a gift from God on the day you were baptized. And it's a gift to be used – to be put to work in the world.

So the pressure is off. Don't overthink this - we don't need to pray for more faith, because the faith God has given you is the faith God wants you to have and to use and to live into in the world. Your faith, your trust in God, your belief that God is with you, that God will see you through and strengthen you, because it is God who has it work in you through the Holy Spirit.

Your faith – you've had it all along – and it is sufficient for God to work in and through you doing great things. So, don't overthink it. God will lead you where you need to be, here, now, always. Amen. Thanks be to God.