

A World of Faith

[Luke 17:5-6]

K Karpen, World Communion Sunday, October 3, 2004

[Luke 17:5-6 "A World of Faith," K Karpen, World Communion Sunday, 10/3/04]

"The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!"

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."

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"Increase our faith."

The disciples are hanging out with Jesus one day, and they say to him, "Increase our faith." This is not an out of the blue comment. Jesus has been speaking to them about responsibility and forgiveness.

"If someone crosses you, and says they are sorry, forgive them."

Fine. But what if they do it again & again & again. Jesus says, "Forgive them again & again & again." No wonder they say, "Increase our faith!"

It's like they are saying, "We can get through the day, most days, on our single gigabyte of faith. But if you expect things like that from us, we're gonna need a major upgrade. We have faith, but we don't have enough for what you ask. Give us more."

It's a reasonable request. Jesus knows it's a reasonable request. Jesus never says it's not a reasonable request. It's just not the right request. It's a request that shows they don't know the first thing about faith, or the second or third.

The first thing about faith is that it's not a question of quantity. You don't need much. Any at all is plenty.

The second thing about faith is that what matters is intensity.

The third thing about faith is that it's not a thing to possess but a way to live.

I would like to spend a few minutes with you today going over these three things about faith.

First, the question of quantity. Jesus starts to say to them, "If you had faith the size of a mustard seed... If you had faith *this* big... Forget your gigabyte. If you had a megabyte; if you had a kilobyte; if you had a byte or a bit, it would be plenty to go on.

Faith isn't about you and anything you have or don't have. Faith is about God. Faith is about relationship with God. Faith is about being networked with God.

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If you are networked with God, you are connected with people of faith around this room and around the world; you have a world of faith at your disposal, and it's enough.

Because the second thing about faith is that it's all about intensity. John the Divine writes to the church at Laodocia and says, "You are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot, but you are so lukewarm it makes me want to spew you from my mouth." Love that verse.

It reminds me of our water heater. For months, those I live with have been commenting about the coolness of the hot water. But I went to check on it a couple of times, and the thermostat dial was always turned to hot. So I didn't worry about it. Plus, it was summer. How hot do you want your shower to be when it's 90° outside?

Last week I took another look. I got down on my hands & knees and took another look. And sure enough, farther up the dial from "hot" is "very hot." I turned up the heat. The water heater makes the same amount of hot water. It's just hotter. It's more intense.

What moves mountains & mulberry trees isn't a lot of faith. It's the intensity of the faith.

The third thing about faith is that it's not a thing to possess, but a way to live. Live in faith. Live in confidence in the world & the God who made it. Things will work.

I thought about that on Friday at the end of the Bruce Springsteen concert in Philadelphia. The concert was long. We'd left a lot of time to get back; our train was leaving Philly at 12:30. But the concert was long, and we had no idea how to get from the stadium back to the train station, so we wanted to leave a lot of time.

11:00 came and went. Bruce was singing. We stayed. 11:15. 11:30. Bruce was still singing. We got nervous; 11:40, Bruce was finishing "Born to Run." We got up & ran. Ran out the bleachers; ran down the hall; ran down the escalators; ran through the security gate.

"Are there cabs out here?" "Lots of cabs," said the security guy. But it's Philadelphia, and they don't know what "lots of cabs" are. We ran across the parking lot, frantically looking, hoping, praying.

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We found the subway. They have a subway—who knew? But it wasn't working. It had already closed for the night.

I suddenly realized...

It was OK.

I could calm down.

It would work out.

Something would work out.

We'd make it to the train.

Or not.

And it was OK.

Faith is a little like that. Faith is confidence in the author of life. Confidence in God to accompany you through life, whatever life deals us. We are not facing anything alone. We are connected. We are networked.

The word "believe" is related to an old anglo-saxon word for being in love. We think beliefs are things we think. We try to lodge them in our brains, when all the while they belong in the heart.

What do I believe? Ask me where's my heart.

Where's my faith? It's following my heart.

With faith like that, with a connection like that, with a link like that, you can get a mulberry tree to dance & swim if you and God want it to. If that's the faithful thing to do.

Which brings me to my last point, and here I'd like to leave it. What's your faith for? Who's your faith for? For you or for God? Which reminds me of an old Sufi tale. Once a seeker went from land to land seeking authentic faith. Finally, the seeker found a group whose reputation went before it. The goodness of their lives & the singleness of their hearts & the sincerity of their service to others.

"I see all that," said the seeker. "And I'm impressed by it. But before I join up, I need to know, does your God work miracles?"

"It depends," he was told.

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"It depends on what you mean by a miracle. Some people call it a miracle when God does the will of the people. We call it a miracle when people do the will of God."

May our faith, tiny as it may be, link us with the God of our lives. And with that connection, there is no limit to the amazing miracles we can do together with our God and two-billion of our closest friends.

Amen!!