

Just Enough Faith Luke 17:5-10

Introduction

In one of the commentaries I read this week as I prepared for this sermon, the author described a time when his daughter Becky was in the sixth grade. He took her with him when he made a quick stop at the local grocery store. Unbeknownst to him at that time, the advertising team from the Nestle company was there, conducting a contest. The question they posed to young Becky was to name the current TV spokesman for the Nestle Crunch candy bar.

The commentator was amazed when Becky blurted out the correct answer: John Elway, the then quarterback of the Denver Broncos. That answer won for Becky a 10 pound Nestle Crunch Bar. It was about two feet long, a foot wide and three inches thick.

He wrote: "What do you do with a ten pound Nestle Crunch Bar? We ate and we ate and we ate. Then we gave some away. Then we ate some more. I got so sick of Nestle Crunch that I never wanted to see one again! And I haven't eaten once since!"

Some people say "Too much of a good thing is bad for you." For the author, that was true about Nestle Crunch bars.

- I fear it might also be true about chocolate chip cookies and Schuler's Cream filled doughnuts, but I haven't discovered the point where I never want to see one again.

There are some things we can get too much of. There are other things where we think we never have enough. For those things we would never arrive at the point where we would say "Too much! Stop! No more!"

The Gospel text today focuses on something we can't get enough of. Look at verse 5:

The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!" (Luke 17:5)

The plea of the disciples is likely a plea that many of us have prayed at some time or another, because ...

We all come to those moments in our journey of faith where we wonder if the faith we have is big enough for that obstacle we face.

That was where my thinking went as I began to reflect on the readings for today. As I put myself into the three Scripture readings for today, I found that I could resonate with those disciples. I've made that plea before. That led me to this question:

Why do I sometimes think my faith is too small? What is happening in and around me during those times?

When I returned to the readings, I saw ...

In Habakkuk: The prophet who was overwhelmed with the state of the world around him, and he felt helpless to do anything about it.

Destruction and violence are before me; there is strife, and conflict abounds. The law is paralyzed, and justice never prevails. (Habakkuk 1:3b-4)

Instead of justice, he saw only violence.

- All around him was growing evidence that the world was descending into madness
- His nation was coming to ruin
- He saw nothing but strife and conflict at every turn.
- Even the law that was designed to bring order and peace seemed paralyzed and unable to do anything!

So Habakkuk cried out:

- How long will this continue?
- Do you even see this?
- Do you even care?

I can relate to that. Can't you? There are times when the realities of life – whether it is the state of the world, or the overwhelming realities of my own personal world – cause me to question if my faith is big enough. We wonder if somehow more faith would make our problems seem less daunting.

And so we cry out “Lord, increase my faith!”

In 2 Timothy: We read words of encouragement from a seasoned pastor (Apostle Paul) to a young pastor named Timothy. Apparently, Timothy was facing an issue that was pretty scary, pretty intimidating for him. If you read the Book of 1 Timothy you will see that Paul addresses several of the problems young Timothy was facing in his church. So Paul needed a second letter, and in today's text Paul reminds Timothy:

For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid (fearful), but gives us power, love and self-discipline. (2 Timothy 1:7)

There are times when I am afraid. I don't know what to do. Or, worse yet, I know exactly what to do and I know full well what will happen if I do it! There is a greater fear of the consequences than there is of the confrontation. So I stand there, hands trembling and knees knocking.

And I think ... “Lord, increase my faith.”

In Luke: Right before the verse that prompted my thinking Jesus has just given the disciples two very important teachings related to their faith journey. He told them:

Things that cause people to stumble are bound to come, but woe to anyone through whom they come. (Luke 17:1)

Even if they sin against you seven times in a day and seven times come back to you saying "I repent," you must forgive them. (Luke 17:4)

People are watching you. Don't do anything that make it hard for them to believe.

- Whenever someone comes to you seeking forgiveness, grant it. And keep on forgiving them, even if they keep on

Verses like these make it clear that living the Christian life is hard and it sometimes requires you to do things that are incredibly difficult. I mean, what is more difficult than that moment when you are standing face-to-face with someone who has hurt you deeply, and they are asking for your forgiveness, and everything inside you wants to scream at them "No" ... and you recall this teaching. I want to be faithful, Lord, but I can't do it. I just can't.

And so we say, "Lord, increase my faith."

The response of Jesus to their plea is startling. He doesn't tell them "Here are six easy steps to growing a bigger faith.

- He doesn't give them a prescription and say "Take one tablet before every meal and watch your faith grow!"

When you get home, Google the phrase "Increase my faith." These are the answers you will find:

- Eight proven ways to increase your faith
- Seven ways to increase and grow your faith
- Increase your faith with these 11 actions

Those are the answers we seek, but what Jesus says is quite the contrary:

If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, "Be uprooted and planted in the sea," and it will obey you. (Luke 17:6)

In other words, you already have more faith than you need. You already have just enough. The faith that resides in the heart of the weakest Christian has more power behind it than any problem or issue you will ever face. Mustard seeds conquer mulberry trees every day of the week!

If that is true, why do we plead for more? Why do we not see the faith we already have as sufficient for the moment? Let me help you answer that in your own lives by asking you two more questions:

QUESTION #1: WHAT DO YOU ALREADY KNOW?

We read in Romans 10:17:

Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God. (Romans 10:17)

You have heard sermons and Sunday School lessons grounded in God's Word. Your own individual Bible studies have given you a base of faith. What have you learned through those experiences?

- When you think your faith might be insufficient, when you recognize the need for an increase the amount of faith you have, return to God's Word and remember what you already know to be true.

As you do, you will remember the God of the Scriptures. He is the God who:

- Parts the waters of the Red Sea and walks on the waters of Galilee.
- Heals the sick and drives away those who take advantage of the sick
- Feeds the multitudes and hugs the little children.

You will remember His desire to protect you. You will remember His constant presence in your life. You will remember that He loves you very much.

Here is a verse we all need to memorize, and in those moments when our faith seems insufficient for the task, we need to reflect on its truth:

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory ... (Ephesians 3:20-21)

That's not new, right? You know that. But when those obstacles come, we sometimes need to remember it. We need to reflect on what we already know.

And instead of saying "increase my faith," we need to say "I already have just enough faith for this moment."

QUESTION #2: WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE?

Hebrews 11:1 tells us:

Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.
(Hebrews 11:1)

Faith is not simply knowing the facts, but also a willingness to move forward based on what we know. Moving from knowing to believing is something we do every day in other areas of our lives. We learn about it, and we then we believe it true.

Ultimately what we do when faced with that obstacle will be based on what we believe. If we truly believe, we can move forward it in faith. But if we don't believe, we will be like the African impala.

I learned this recently. Did you know that the African impala can jump to a height of over 10 feet and cover a distance of greater than 30 feet. Yet these magnificent creatures can be kept in an enclosure in any zoo with a 3-foot wall. The animals will not jump if they cannot see where their feet will fall.

Faith is the ability to trust what we cannot see, and with faith we are freed from the flimsy enclosures of life that only fear allows to entrap us.

Charles Spurgeon, the great English preacher in the late 1800s, said:

Faith is believing that Christ is what He is said to be, and that He will do what He has promised to do, and then to expect this of Him. (Charles Haddon Spurgeon)

APPLICATION

When Habakkuk cried to the Lord about all the mess he saw around him, God responded. That response is in a verse we did not read today – one located between the two paragraphs.

(God speaking) Look at the nations and watch—and be utterly amazed. For I am going to do something in your days that you would not believe, even if you were told. (Habakkuk 1:5)

So, when you feel that your faith is too small or that the obstacle in front of you is too big, take comfort in our Lord's reminder that small faith in a great God is sufficient.

It is OK to pray for more faith, and I hope and pray that you continues to grow every day ... but the faith you have already have is more than enough.

Amen.