

Mystic Congregational Church, UCC

Mystic, Connecticut

Sermon from October 7, 2007

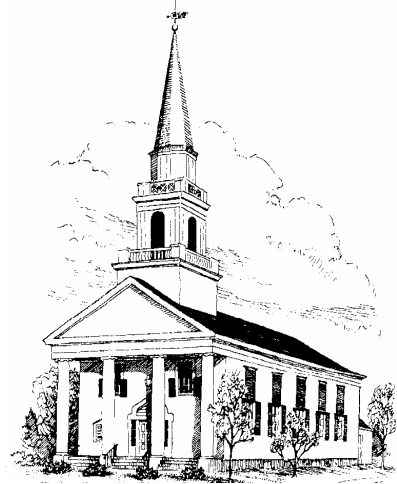
Rev. Barbara J. Libby

“Keeping Faith Alive”

Scriptures:

2 Timothy 1:1-14

Luke 17:5-6



The disciples said to Jesus, “Increase our faith!” We don’t know exactly what precipitated that request or exactly what made it clear to the disciples that they needed “more” or “bigger” faith.

In the early 21st century, marketing folks try to convince us at every turn that the “more” we have, the better and the bigger, the better and that, of course, we must always aim for the bigger car, the bigger house, the bigger yard, etc. Especially in the food industry, we are bombarded with the assumption that a super-size of anything—steak, hamburger, beverage or french fries is much “better” than the regular size.

So, perhaps, these sorts of assumptions have been around a much longer time than I had imagined. Or, perhaps, the disciples were aware (as we ourselves can be) that our own faith is small and in need of being grown and increased.

What we can surmise from our reading from Luke’s text for today is that the disciples were worried or at least concerned about the size of their faith. The disciples, at this point in Jesus’ ministry, had already been sent out into the world as missionary teams. Perhaps they had come upon persons who they could not heal. Perhaps they had come upon situations that seemed to go beyond what they could handle. Perhaps they had come face to face with their own limitations.

Like many of us, the disciples had their doubts about whether their faith would be “enough”. And so they brought their concern to their teacher and friend—the one who, over and over again, had helped them understand who God is and what God could do for them.

When the disciples come to Jesus with the request, “Increase our faith,” Jesus does not fail them, although Jesus’ answer may not have been what they had hoped for. Jesus first assures the disciples that the faith they do have is more than enough for them. When Jesus begins with the statement, “If you had faith,” it can be better translated to read: “If you had faith and you do!” Jesus begins by reassuring them that their faith is enough to do the job!

Yet Jesus doesn’t just say these assuring words. As usual, Jesus finds a wonderful anal-

ogy to go with his words. He finds a simple object—familiar to all of them—and uses that object for a lesson. He compares their faith to the mustard seed, one of the smallest of seeds to be found in the Middle East.

And Jesus says, “If you have the faith that I know you already have, even if it is as small as a mustard seed, you will be able to do marvelous things. Your faith is great enough that you could say to that mulberry tree (right over there—see it?) You could say to that tree right now: ‘Be uprooted and be planted in the sea’ and it would happen!”

I’m sure we’ve all heard this story of the mustard seed faith somewhere in our past. I can reach back in my own history and remember how I yearned for a mustard seed locket. You know—the ones where a tiny glass globe contains an actual mustard seed floating in some sort of liquid.

Somehow, even as a child, I understood this wonderful object lesson of Jesus. Even as a child, I understood that there was power even in faith as small as a “mustard seed”. Somehow that was very reassuring for me as a child, even as it still is for me as an adult. (Yes, I did finally receive such a mustard seed necklace and remember wearing it for years.)

And returning to this text again now as I approach another birthday soon, I hear Jesus’ words and they still reassure me. Has my faith shifted and changed through the years? Yes. Have I spent time and moved along on my spiritual journey? Yes. Do I have all the answers? No! Do I have my faith all wrapped up and tied neatly? No! Yet I have these words and this object lesson from Jesus and I feel a sense of reassurance. Jesus wanted us to rest assured that the faith we have is enough for what God will call us to do.

Perhaps you, too, identify with the disciples as they approach Jesus hoping and pleading to a bigger faith. Perhaps you, too, want a faith that is strong and increases in its power in the face of all that life deals us. Perhaps you, too, like me, want a faith that provides clarity and certainty in the face of all the ethical dilemmas, the moral ambiguities, and the daily challenges in our lives.

I want a faith that will hold me through the tough times and sustain me through the crises. Paul’s letter from prison to his colleague, Timothy, in Ephesus says, “Rekindle the gift of God that is within you.”

Do you hear Paul’s phrase as similar to what Jesus said to his disciples? Paul seeks to reassure Timothy that the spirit of God resides in him already—no matter how small it may seem at times—and that that gift of God within each of us can be like a spark, a spark that gets a fire going. Sometimes all it takes is one spark! Sometimes all it takes is faith as small as a mustard seed to do amazing things!

Jesus assured us that it isn’t the size of our faith that matters but rather what we do with that faith that makes a difference in this life. The power of God is within us—maybe only a tiny spark—yet the power of God is within us.

As we come to this communion table this morning, as we prepare to take into our bodies a small piece of bread and a sip of juice—yes, these are small symbols of the body and life blood of Jesus Christ—these are remembrances of a powerful reality.

Let us receive the gift of God for the people of God. Let us recall this day that our faith may be as small as a mustard seed or as tiny as a spark. Yet rest assured—that tiny seed of faith, that tiny spark of the spirit, it is sufficient! It is enough!

Alleulia! Amen!

