

**“Faith is enough” a sermon based on Luke 17:5-10 preached at Knox Church Dunedin New Zealand by Kerry Enright on 6 October 2019.**

Faith is mostly ordinary, unexceptional and in a way boring. And it is when faith feels like that, that we are most likely to give it up.

Less so when we sense something is at stake, when we are having to make difficult decisions, when we face serious challenges or organised opposition, when we need to act courageously or take a risk. At such times we are often galvanised, animated, awakened. Faith seems to make a difference and be worthy of commitment. In those times we know we need to draw from a deep well.

But when life involves the tedium of just doing what seems right day after day and year after year, when life involves negotiating awkward or messy relationships week after week, when faith is a matter of daily discipline – of sustained openness to truth, of praying, reading, worshipping, studying, when faith is ordinary, it is easy to drift away, bored.

Immediately before today’s reading Jesus has told the disciples: If the same person sins against you seven times a day, and turns back to you seven times and says “I repent”, “you must forgive”. Really? You mean I have to do this, seven times a day, day after day, week after week, year after year? That it will never get better than this? That I will never be free of the quick-mouthed Peter, the fastidiously financial Judas, the ones who argued about who was the greatest, the quiet Andrew, the Thomas who kept asking questions? This is what it involves, day after day, year after year?

It’s not surprising the disciples desperately ask – “Increase our faith!” Not an uncommon request, that comes in many forms. And it raises a question about what faith is.

Sometimes people ask for "the faith that moves mountains" — a dramatic faith, that makes an evident difference quickly, a decisive change now, that involves a courageous act. Sometimes people ask for an intellectual boost that enables them to affirm the more challenging tenets of traditional Christianity — the Virgin Birth, the Resurrection, the Second Coming. Sometimes people ask for an antidote to anxiety: “God, please

take away the fear I feel. Grant me greater certainty so I'll feel stronger, more spiritual, less nervous.”

Sometimes people ask for faith that enables them to forgive more easily or to live more freely. Sometimes people ask for a change of circumstances so their faith will grow: a church that loves them or a minister that encourages them or music that inspires them or a role that helps them feel more useful or an age group that understands them. Sometimes people imagine that faith is the opposite of doubt or fear or ambivalence or confusion, that if I had enough faith, I would not experience unbelief, distrust, depression, anxiety or .... But that is a lie, and a damaging lie.

Faith isn't quantifiable. We cannot have more or less faith. Jesus says to his disciples – If you had faith the size of a mustard seed ... a very small seed – a very small faith. Because faith is a verb not a noun. Faith is engagement, orientation, direction. Faith is something we do, not something we have.

"Your faith has saved you," he tells a woman who anoints his feet, a Samaritan leper who returns to thank him, and a bleeding woman who grasps his cloak. "Your faith has made you well," he tells a blind beggar. "Such faith I have not seen in all of Israel!" he exclaims about a Roman centurion.

What is it that Jesus admires in these people? The only thing they do is turn to him. Orient themselves in his direction. *Trust* him. What earns his admiration is their willingness — even in difficult, painful, and potentially risky circumstances — to lean into his goodness, healing, justice, and mercy. "If you had faith the size of a mustard seed," Jesus says to his disciples. As if to say - You have faith already.

This is not about quantity. You *have* faith — because you have me. You've seen me and known me. Having faith means pursuing God and the things of God even when the pursuit feels painful or pointless. Faith is *not just* deciding once and for all to follow Jesus. Faith is living within God's extravagant decision to love and pursue *us*. Faith is trusting Jesus one step at a time, day after day after day. For the long haul.

One of the great pastoral theologians of our age was Eugene Peterson. Peterson was asked what advice he would give to young Christians looking to grow in their faith. He said this: "Go to the nearest smallest church and commit yourself to being there for six months. If it doesn't work out, find somewhere else. But don't look for programs, don't look for entertainment, and don't look for a great preacher. A Christian congregation is not a glamorous place, not a romantic place... the smallest church; the closest church; and commit to staying there 6 months."

My advice to people looking for a church - don't look for extras. Look for faithfulness.

The life of faith is as straightforward as a slave serving his master dinner. As ordinary as a hired worker fulfilling the terms of his contract. Faith isn't fireworks. It isn't miracles. It isn't meant to dazzle. Faith is simply recognising our tiny place in God's enormous, creative love, and then filling that place with our whole lives. Faith is simply showing up where we are expected to show up when we're expected to show up – and not asking for or expecting more.

Barbara Brown Taylor writes that we waste a great deal of time and energy looking for the "key to the treasure box of More." All we lack, she argues, "is the willingness to imagine that we already have everything we need. The only thing missing is our consent to be where we are."

It only takes faith the size of a mustard seed, dropped where it can take root, to do what God is calling us to do. God doesn't need us to believe enough. God is calling us to be *faith-ful*, to trust God, to seek the will of God, to respond to the call of God, to do the work God has given us, as obedient servants. God is calling us to offer our prayers, our presence, our gifts, our service, and our witness as we live out our faith together in this community we call 'church'. God is calling us to trust God's faithfulness to us even when our faith is wavering.

The disciples don't need more faith, and neither do we. We are called to trust God with the faith we have. It's not a fancy faith and it may not seem like much, but in Christ it is enough. To the glory of God.

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