



“MUSTARD SEED FAITH” Pilgrim UCC 10-3-10
Luke 17:5-10; II Timothy 1:1-14 (Proper 22-C) Rev. Janet Boyd Weidler

At some time or another, most of us have wished for more faith. When we face big challenges, we might ask God to supersize our faith, as the disciples asked Jesus that day. They had just heard Jesus' very challenging teachings about discipleship and forgiveness, and they probably felt inadequate and unqualified for the job description they had just been handed. So naturally they ask Jesus for more faith. To which Jesus ALLEGEDLY replied: "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.

But many commentators believe Jesus' words have been mistranslated. Scholars believe that Jesus' words should be translated, not, “if you have faith the size of a mustard seed,” but “because you have faith the size of a mustard seed, “Because you have faith the size of a mustard seed you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea', and it would obey you. Imagine it- A tiny grain of mustard seed enough to move a tree! Jesus' answer to the disciples seems to re-frame the issue. Even a seed-size portion of faith can accomplish great things. Very reassuring.

In the time of Jesus, mustard seeds were used for seasoning. Sort of like garlic. You don't need huge quantities of it in a recipe to make a great dish- and it's the same with faith. The issue is not whether we have enough faith, but whether and how we are using the faith we have!

It's the difference between deficit thinking and possibility thinking. Deficit thinking focuses on what we don't have and on problems to be solved. Possibility Thinking focuses on recognizing the value of what we do have, envisioning what might be, and innovative work toward what will be. *(material from 8-10 Conference on Church Renewal in Atlanta)*

Possibility Thinking allows you to better recognize and appreciate and use all the assets and gifts you have- and come together with others to fulfill a vision. Mustard seed faith is Possibility Thinking vs. Deficit Thinking

Think for a moment of the example of Mother Theresa. She was an example to all the world of what we call great faith- and yet, as we have learned from her writings, her inner spiritual and life of faith was very different from her outward ministries. She has written of the great spiritual darkness that enveloped her, a darkness in which it felt like God was silent and absent.



Other spiritual giants, as well as ordinary folk, have had similar experiences of darkness in their faith journeys, yet have persevered in living out their calling as best they could. Isn't it amazing how much good Mother Theresa was able to do with what she would probably characterize as a mustard seed of faith. Despite her loneliness and darkness, she never abandoned her ministry with the poor, she never gave up her calling. Faith the size of a mustard seed, faith that also included deep doubts was enough for her to change the world for the better.

I wonder how often we miss opportunities to serve because we don't think we have enough faith, or enough gifts, or enough of whatever we think it will take.

What opportunities are we missing, to do small things, to plant little mustard seeds in the lives of people around us, because we see our glass half empty instead of half full, because we have deep self doubts, or because we are holding out for some great work out there somewhere. Mother Theresa once said: "In this life we cannot do great things. We can only do small things with great love. "

The writer of 1st Timothy, confined in prison, wasn't able to do any great things- he couldn't travel across sea and land to start new churches, but that didn't stop him from using his faith, from doing small things with great love. What did he do? He wrote letters. He prayed for and encouraged his brothers and sisters in Christ. We heard earlier a portion of one of those letters: With great affection, the writer says, To Timothy, my beloved child, and assures him that he is remembered daily in prayer. What a wonderful message to receive from a teacher and fellow worker, or from a friend! The seemingly unimportant messages of encouragement and support that we give, the words of appreciation and affirmation, the small acts of kindness, we offer sometimes make the difference between hope and despair in the lives of the people around us.

What a difference such a word or act of encouragement and kindness might have made for Tyler Clementi. After a video invading his personal privacy went viral on the internet this week, the 18 year old Rutgers freshman committed suicide by jumping off of the George Washington Bridge. When an 18 year old child of God is so tormented and shamed for who he is that he has no way out but suicide, God's very heart is wounded,

And sadly, newspapers report that Tyler's death was part of a string of suicides last month involving youngsters who were believed to have been victims of anti-gay bullying. Fifteen year old Billy Lucas hanged himself in a barn in Greenburg, Indiana. Asher Brown, 13, shot himself in the head in Houston. And 13 year old Seth Walsh of California hanged himself from a tree in his backyard. What a difference it might have made if these young people had received messages of affirmation,



appreciation and encouragement. They remind me that we should never let our anxiety of not being able to do enough, keep us from offering the word or act of kindness that we DO have within us to give.

Nancy Ramsay, while a professor at Louisville Presbyterian Seminary recalls the story of Ruby Bridges. Ruby Bridges was an African-American child whose faith in God allowed her to single-handedly desegregate an all-white school in New Orleans, LA at the tender age of 6. "Her faith in God was sufficient to allow her to walk through a gauntlet of angry, loud, white men and women every morning with an armed guard and pray for those who shouted hateful things at her. Ruby did not need to be older, bigger or more mature in her thinking than she already was to participate in uprooting a vast system of racial injustice. She used well the faith that she had.

Despite her amazing accomplishment of desegregating that school, Ruby did not view what she did as an achievement for which she should be rewarded. Rather, it was simply what she as a Christian was called to do. Like the servant in the parable who was only doing his duty, Ruby was simply fulfilling her calling as a Christian. (*Nancy Ramsay, Lectionary Homiletics, 10-01*)

We could waste a lot of time wishing for more faith, more gifts, more whatever- but God will be pleased if we get into action using the faith, the gifts, the treasures we already have.

May it be so for each of us!