

“Faith in Every Shape and Size”
C Pentecost 20, October 2, 2016
Congregational UCC
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I. JUST A PINCH

JESUS (to the disciples): “Hard trials and temptations are bound to come.

DISCIPLES: Well, yeah! Tell us something we didn’t know, JC.

JESUS: Be alert. If you see your friend going wrong, correct him. If he responds, forgive him. Even if it’s personal against you and repeated seven times through the day, and seven times he says, ‘I’m sorry, I won’t do it again,’ forgive him.”

DISCIPLES: Oh. Even then? Even if he doesn’t listen to our good advice? Even if he’s done us wrong seven times?! Us personally?

JESUS: Yup. Even then. Even if it’s personal. Seven times. There’s no cutting corners here!

DISCIPLES: Ummm.....Jesus, we’re gonna need more faith for that! Like....we needed it yesterday. Like bunches more faith! Boatloads.

JESUS: Oh ye of little faith! When *will* you ever *get* this?! “You don’t need more faith. There is no ‘more’ or ‘less’ in faith. If you

have a bare kernel of faith, say the size of a poppy seed, you could say to this sycamore tree, ‘Go jump in the lake,’ and it would do it.

DISCIPLES: MMmmmm. I like poppy seed muffins!! Is *that* all we need? A snack-size bit of faith?! Like a seed that gets stuck in your teeth? Or a kernel—you mean like popcorn?

JESUS: Maybe if we go have a snack, you’ll understand! Time-out, guys!

II. SO, HOW MUCH DO YOU NEED?!

How much faith DO we need, anyway? What do you think? And, really, do we *ever* have enough? How much is *enough*?

"How much wood would a woodchuck chuck if a woodchuck could chuck wood?"

How much faith do the faithful need to be faith-ful-ly up to speed?!

Say that ten times fast ☺

How much faith do the faithful need to be faith-ful-ly up to speed?!

Maybe it’s not that our faith is too small, but our concept of God is! There’s a saying:

“Your faith may not be too small. Maybe your *God* is.”

It’s easy to put God in a box—to limit the scope of God’s being, God’s concern for creation, God’s intentions for the world, and intentions for us, specifically.

It’s also easy to put faith in a box. To neatly define “faith” as “having belief in something,” or “trusting that some situation will

turn out okay.” And then, if it *doesn't*, we think faith is to blame. Either we did something wrong—came up short ourselves—didn't pray hard enough. Or, we were asking for the wrong thing. Or, we're just simply not a good enough person to warrant our faith being there for us when the chips are down. You know, there was that one time years ago when I did that thing or things I shouldn't have.....

....When I fell off the path. Denied my faith, stopped going to church, didn't believe in God for awhile.....whatever perceived misdeed we did when we “lost our faith.”

Can you have enough faith? How *much* is enough? Can you lose your faith? If you stop practicing—like the piano—do you lose your touch? Or, is it like riding a bicycle—somehow, your faith just stays embedded deep down inside you and sometime—when you're ready—you can try to tap into it again. Even take it OUT of the box!

III. SIZE MATTERS? NOT

There's another saying in our culture. Besides that one: “Your faith may not be too small. Maybe your God is.” This one says, “Size matters.”

Size *does* matter in a lot of places and circumstances. Our doors have to be big enough, open enough to welcome in the stranger. Our table has to be spread wide enough so that everyone knows they are welcome. Our hearts have to be big enough to keep on loving our neighbors as ourselves even when it's not easy or popular.

But with faith, Jesus says (again!):

“You don't need *more* faith. There is no 'more' or 'less' in faith. If you have a bare kernel of faith, say the size of a poppy seed, you could say to this sycamore tree, 'Go jump in the lake,' and it would do it.

IV. YOU NEED A BIGGER CONTAINER

The size or amount of our faith may be just fine. But our

understanding of God and the box we put God in may well need a big upgrade!

The first step, in our 2.0 to 3.0 upgrade is to look at our understanding of what faith even IS. As I said, we tend to box “Faith” into a notion of just a “belief system” or commodity or amount of “ability to trust.”

What if it's barely about “belief” at all?

In the bible,

“faith” primarily means personal loyalty, personal commitment, fidelity, and the solidarity that comes from such faithfulness.

(David Ewert)

So, Jesus is telling his disciples (and us) with this silly sarcasm about telling Mulberry trees to go “jump in the lake!” that they are “looking for faith in all the wrong places” and being HERE, in this circle, at the table, in relationship with him and one another is all that is truly needed.

Loyalty, personal commitment, faithfulness to God and one another—you got this! Aren't you here?

And two: what you need is already within you.

Jesus was not scolding the disciples (or us), but reminding. “The faith you think you need is already within you. You might need to dig deeper to find it, but it's THERE!. It was a seed alright—maybe a mustard seed, maybe a poppy seed—but a seed that was planted inside you before you were knit together in your mother's womb, known, claimed, dreamed up by God.

V. BABY-SIZED FAITH

Today, in Baptism, and in Communion, we celebrate the gifts of God for the people of God. These gifts that are signs of God's presence, self-giving and creating and claiming us.

In coming together, gathering around the Font and at the Table, we don't "find our faith" or "find *more* faith," but *rekindle* what is already there—within us and present around and among us.

By so doing, we remember our own baptism—even if we were very young—our hearts remember in a way that our minds only hope to grasp. We re-member, re-connect, re-ignite the seed of God that is within us and which sprouts and grows and flourishes in family; in Christ-centered community.

Whenever we Eat this bread, take this cup, welcome this Child in Christ's name, we re-create with God our faith, each other's faith, and the faith of our world.

Personal loyalty, personal commitment, fidelity and solidarity—kindled here in this place and throughout the Kingdom of God. Thanks be to God for these incredible gifts! Lord, increase our faith, the size of our container. Grow our understanding and fill us up till our cup runneth over —brimming with Faith-FULL-ness! Amen.