

“If I just had more faith...” I think most of us have struggled with that at some point in our lives. If I just had more faith I wouldn't have so many questions or doubts. If I just had more faith God would answer my prayers. If I just had more faith I would be more involved in the church. If I just had more faith I would be a better person, a better parent, a better spouse. If I just had more faith I would know what to do and I would handle things better. If I just had more faith life would be different.

It is an approach to faith at least as old as the apostles' own faith. It is the approach they have taken in today's gospel. “Increase our faith,” they ask Jesus. Jesus has just warned them not to become stumbling blocks to others and enjoined them to forgive as often as an offender repents even if it is seven times in one day. That will be difficult. It will be a challenge to live that way.

“Increase our faith,” is their response. It seems like a reasonable request. If a little is good a lot must be better.

The request to increase our faith, the belief that if I had more faith things would be different, reveals a misunderstanding of faith itself and demonstrates our own unfaithfulness. Jesus is very clear that faithfulness is not about size or quantity. “If you had faith the size of a mustard seed,” he says, “you could say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and it would obey you.”

Faith is not given to us on account to be spent as currency in our dealings with God. Faith is not measured out according to how difficult the task or work before us. Faith is not a thing we have or get. Faith is a relationship of trust and love. It means opening ourselves to receive another's life and giving our life to another. That other one is Jesus. That one faith-relationship is what determines who we are and how we live.

Faith is not about giving intellectual agreement to a particular doctrine or idea. Faith is not about how much or how strongly we believe Jesus's words or actions. When we speak about a married couple's faithfulness we do not mean they believe or agree with each other's ideas or even a particular understanding of marriage. They are faithful because they have committed themselves to each

other in love and trust. They are faithful because they continually give their life to the other and receive the other's life as their own.

They are faithful because they carry with them that one relationship wherever they go and in all that they are and all that they do. So it is in our faith-relationship with Jesus.

Faith will not, however, change the circumstances of our lives. Instead, it changes us. Living in faith does not shield us from the pain and difficulties of life, it does not undo the past, and it will not guarantee a particular future. Rather, faith is the means by which we face and deal with the circumstances of life – the difficulties and losses, the joys and successes, the opportunities and possibilities.

Faith does not get us a pat on the back, a reward, or a promotion in God's eyes. It is simply the way in which we live and move and have our being so that, at the end of the day, the faithful ones can say, without pride or shame, "We have done only what we ought to have done!" We have lived in openness to trust in, and love Christ. If we have allowed him to guide our decisions, our words, and our actions, then we will be sustained by him in both life and death.

Faith, however, is not lived out in the abstract. It is practiced day after day in the ordinary everyday circumstances. Some days when the pain and heaviness of life seem more than we can carry it is by faith and our relationship with Jesus, that we get up each morning and face the reality of life. Other days present other circumstances. When we feel the pain of the world and respond with compassion by feeding the hungry, housing the homeless, speaking for justice; when we experience the brokenness of a relationship and offer forgiveness and mercy; when we see the downtrodden and offer our presence and prayers — in all those we have lived, seen, and acted by faith. Then there are days when we feel powerless, lost, and do not know the way forward. By faith we sit in silence and wait.

Faith, then, is how we live; the lens through which we see ourselves, others, and the world; the criterion by which we act and speak. We live by faith not because we have *enough* faith but because we have faith, any faith, even mustard seed sized faith. That is all we need. Jesus believes that. So should we.

The question is not how much faith we have but, rather, how are we living the faith we do have. How is our faith, our relationship with Jesus, changing our lives, our relationships with the lives of others? If it is not, more of the same will surely make no difference. The mustard seed of faith is already planted within us. It is Christ himself. He has withheld from us nothing. We already have enough. We already are enough. We do not need more faith. We need more response to the faith, the Christ, the mustard seed, the relationship we already have. The songwriter, Stuart Townsend, wrote this song in 2009.

By faith, we see the hand of God
In the light of creation's grand design;
In the lives of those who prove His faithfulness,
Who walk by faith and not by sight.

By faith, our fathers roamed the earth
With the power of His promise in their hearts
Of a holy city built by God's own hand -
A place where peace and justice reign.

We will stand as children of the promise,
We will fix our eyes on Him, our soul's reward.
Till the race is finished and the work is done,
We'll walk by faith and not by sight.

By faith, the prophets saw a day
When the longed-for Messiah would appear
With the power to break the chains of sin and death,
And rise triumphant from the grave.

By faith, the church was called to go
In the power of the Spirit to the lost
To deliver captives and to preach good news,
In every corner of the earth.

By faith, this mountain shall be moved
And the power of the gospel shall prevail,
For we know in Christ all things are possible
For all who call upon His name.

Amen.

