

“FAITH FOR MAXIMUM LIVING”
Deuteronomy 11:8-21, Acts 11:19-24, Luke 17:1-10
February 17 & 18, 2024

“A far-famed tightrope walker came to Niagara Falls and stretched his rope across the thunderous currents from Canada to the United States. Before the breathless multitudes, he walked, then ran, across the falls. He did the same blindfolded, with drums rolling. Then, still blindfolded, he pushed a wheelbarrow across the falls.

“The crowds went wild, and the aerialist shouted to them, ‘Who believes I can push a man in this wheelbarrow across these falls?’

“A gentleman in the front waved his hands, shouting, ‘I do! I believe!’

“Then,’ said the tightrope walker, ‘come and get in the wheelbarrow.’

“To no surprise, the man’s intellectual assent failed to translate into personal belief.”¹

Having seen the tightrope walker go back and forth on the rope, it would be easy for all of us to agree that he could transport a person from one side of the rope to the other. But it is quite a different matter to actually get into the wheelbarrow and become a part of the whole ordeal! Many times our faith is strong as long as someone else is involved, but when it means getting right into the action part of showing our faith, it is all too easy to falter and decline the opportunity to grow still further in our faith by stepping out into the action.

H.H. Rowley puts it this way. “The New Testament insists so much on faith. For faith is no mere intellectual belief, though it inevitably includes an intellectual element. But fundamentally it is not an integrated system of theology but the surrender of the person. When Jesus said to men, ‘Your faith has saved you,’ He was not thinking in terms of a creed. He meant such a belief in Him, to be recreated by His touch and transformed into His own likeness. The woman who was a sinner and who bathed His feet with her tears heard Jesus say, ‘Your faith has saved you; go in peace’ (Luke 7:50). She did not return to her sin, for she went forth a changed woman. The self that loved the sin had died, and one now

¹ (Robert J. Morgan, *Stories, Illustrations & Quotes*, [Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2000] pg. 288)

marked with the purity of Christ went forth to live in newness of life.

“This is what is meant by faith elsewhere in the New Testament. It is faith into Christ, faith that so identifies a man with Him who was crucified, that instead of being numbered with His crucifiers, he becomes one with Christ, and the Cross becomes the [vehicle] of his submission of himself to God. Paul said ‘If we have become united with Him by the likeness of His death, we shall be also by the likeness of His resurrection; knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away” (Romans 6:5-6).”²

We become changed by putting our faith into action and allowing the Lord Jesus to transform us from sinner to saint, from death-bound to life-living, from a darkness dweller into a resident of glorious light. While we say we have faith, it is imperative that we move that faith out of our heads and into our actions so that our lives will be changed and we will be able to live abundantly in the blessings of the Lord our God.

Jesus invite us to have faith so that we might do great things for Him here in this world. As He was teaching His disciples about sin and forgiveness, the disciples call for Jesus to increase their faith. Listen to how it is recorded in Luke 17:1-10. (READ Luke 17:1-10)

Now, Jesus was addressing the issue of forgiving one who sinned against us. And the issue was not so much forgiving the person once, but rather repeatedly on the same day. The same person seeking forgiveness over and over and over again gets to be overwhelming for us. We want them to learn and change their ways after the first incident. But to have to forgive the person continually demands patience and lots of grace. So the disciples call out to Jesus, “*Increase our faith!*”

You see, it’s one thing to get it into our heads that we are to forgive one another, seventy-times-seven if necessary, but it’s quite another to put that learning into practice. And that’s where faith begins to show itself. We have to move our head knowledge into life action so that we live our faith and demonstrate to the world the difference that following Jesus’ teachings makes in our lives.

² (Charles L. Wallis, *Lenten-Easter Sourcebook*, [Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1961] pg. 151)

Forgiving each other is almost a lost art in our world today. Someone says or does something that offends another and fists begin to fly all too quickly. And if resolution isn't accomplished, if forgiveness isn't given, it turns into family feuds, which lead to blockades and embargos, which then leads to riots, and riots turn into wars, and wars turn into international chaos. All because forgiveness and reconciliation were not achieved at the personal level.

Yet when we have faith in Jesus' teaching and learn to love our neighbor as ourselves in order to forgive those who wrong us, our faith is put into action and peace ensues.

But faith goes much deeper than just forgiveness. Faith is voluntary anticipation (Clement of Alexandria) of something we do not see. And as we believe in something that we do not see, the reward is to see what you believe (St. Augustine). Faith is believing there will be a fulfillment of those things that are told us by the Lord (Luke 1:45). Faith is not wavering at the promise of God, but being fully convinced that what He has promised He is able to perform (Romans 4:20-21). And faith is the art of holding on to things your reason has once accepted, in spite of your changing moods (C. S. Lewis).

Jesus told His disciples (including us), *“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”* (Luke 17:6).

So how do we do that? It comes by understanding that the Lord our God is more powerful than we could ever know, more ingenious than we could ever imagine, more resourceful than we could ever do on our own, and more patient than we could ever be. Faith in the Lord our God puts our confidence way beyond our own abilities, and trusts that God knows all that is going on, and has everything under control. It is believing that everything happens for a reason, and that despite what is going on around us, God has a plan for every life.

We heard in Deuteronomy today how God directed the people of Israel to *“Observe therefore all the commands I am giving you today, so that you may have the strength to go in and take over the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess, and so that you may live long in the land the Lord swore to your ancestors to give to them...So if you faithfully obey the commands I am giving you today - to love*

the Lord your God and to serve Him with all your hearts and with all your soul - then I will send rain on your land in its season....so that you may gather in your grain, new wine and olive oil. I will provide grass in the fields for your cattle, and you will eat and be satisfied” (Deut. 11:8-9, 13-15). All they needed to do was to step out in faith and do what God was calling them to do, and He would deliver the land into their hands. And many times the people didn't even have to lift a sword or battering ram to conquer armies or cities. God was fighting for them, and all they had to do was to have the faith enough to show up and watch the Lord work! Faith was involved in doing what the Lord God had told them to do, not worried about the outcome, because God had already given the land over to them.

Think about that for us today. For the last 5 years, God was inviting us to be faithful to Him, to follow His will and His ways, and He led us through the whole 17 step ordeal to disaffiliate from the United Methodist Church to become a part of the Global Methodist Church. We had to be faithful to move through the steps, one at a time, but in the end, God supplied us with the resources to pay the fees demanded of us, and we still had resources left over to continue as a vital church.

Then, think about what happened during the Covid19 pandemic. We were diligent to continue to meet together as a congregation to worship God, and because of our faith, He led us through it. Even though we were being told to stay closed and to not worship in person, we did so anyway, and God protected us! We never had an outbreak of Covid19 here in this church. While we did set up some pretty stringent guidelines to satisfy the safety standards, we proved that through our faith in God's protection, we could gather here every week to honor and worship and praise God for keeping us safe. We were faithful to His call for us to continue to gather in worship, and God brought folks from 8-10 other denominations to worship with us because their church wasn't open. God blessed us because we relied upon His protection.

Jesus is calling us to put our faith in Him so that He can work mightily in and through us. We don't need tons of faith to make things happen. Jesus says all we need is faith the size of a mustard seed in order to accomplish what most people think is the impossible.

Do this for a moment. Take your bulletin and look at the Order of Worship. Look just below the first hymn and you'll see the first Scripture lesson. Now look to your right and you'll see an asterisk in front of Eileen Bailey's name. THAT'S THE SIZE OF A MUSTARD SEED! And Jesus tells us that that's all we need in faith to do the impossible here in our world! Isn't that great?

But when we think about that even further, ask yourself, "How many of us right here in this room have that much faith so as to tell a tree to be uprooted and be planted in Lake Michigan?" Most of us don't even have that much faith, the size of an asterisk. But if we did...think about all the things we could do for the Lord with just that small amount of faith!

Think of the people we could heal in the Name of Jesus.

Think of the places that could be transformed because of our faith.

Think of the people who could turn their hearts to trust the Lord Jesus for Salvation.

Think of the relationships that could be healed, the marriages that could be saved.

Think of the hunger we could eliminate in the Name of Jesus.

Think of the poverty we could eradicate because of our faith in Jesus.

Think of what the world would look like if we but had faith in Jesus the size of a 12 point asterisk! The size of a mustard seed! That's all we need to do the impossible!

Our problem is, however, we want to be able to see the end result before we have the faith to step out and make it happen. We're all like Thomas who said, "*Unless I see the nail marks in His hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe*" (John 20:25). We've got to see it to believe it. But Jesus says to us, "Believe it first and then you will see it." He turns the equation around so that our faith has to be there before anything happens.

"Not long after the first Moravian missionaries had left for the West Indies, John Wesley, unconverted at the time, found himself aboard ship alongside another group of them. It was January 25, 1736, and the weather was rough. Three storms had already battered the boat, and a fourth was brewing. Wesley scribbled in his journal, 'Storm great; afraid!' But the Moravians were trusting God so simply

and so completely that they evidenced no signs of fear, and they even persevered in their plans for a worship service. In the middle of their singing, a gigantic wave rose over the side of the vessel, splitting the main-sail, covering the ship, pouring water like Niagara Falls between decks ‘as if the great deep had already swallowed us up’ wrote Wesley.

“The English passengers screamed as the ship lurched and pitched between towering waves. A terrified Wesley clung on for dear life. But the German missionaries didn’t miss a note. Wesley, awestruck by their composure, later went to the leader and asked, ‘Weren’t you afraid?’

“I thank God, no.’

“Were not your women and children afraid?’

“No,’ replied the man. ‘Our women and children are not afraid.’

“Back in London, Wesley was so struck by their sturdy faith that he attended a Moravian meeting on Aldersgate Street on May 24, 1738. He later said, ‘I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation, and an assurance was given to me that He had taken away my sins, even mine!’

And as we know, “Wesley became a famous evangelist and social reformer, with the world as his parish. But he himself was won to Christ by the example of a small group whose faith in Christ was strong enough to keep them unflappable in a storm.”³

Having seen the faith of others in the middle of a terrible storm, John Wesley grew faithful and stepped out to do the work that God had called him to do. And the rest of his life was spent telling the Good News of Jesus Christ to the people around the world. And God provided for him, protected him, and used him in a mighty way, because he put his faith into action and worked in that faith.

It’s that kind of faith that grew the early Christian church. In Acts 11 we heard how men and women put their faith in Jesus Christ and went all over the Mediterranean Sea living their faith before others so that they could receive Jesus as their Savior, too. As they went, telling “*the good news about*

³ (Robert J. Morgan, *Stories, Illustrations & Quotes*, [Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2000] pg. 287)

the Lord Jesus...The Lord's hand was with them and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord" (Acts 11:20-21). Their lives had been so changed by the work of Jesus Christ, that they followed the guiding of the Holy Spirit and shared the Gospel with the people. And they turned the world up-side-down for Christ. Their "mustard-seed" sized faith, when put into action, brought life to so many people.

So let's look at this church again. What might God do through us if we but have mustard seed sized faith? We are positioned perfectly to reach the folks living in the downtown area. What would it take for us to step out to reach them? How can we work together to shine the light of Jesus Christ so brightly that people can't help but see us and come find out what's happening here? What will it take to revitalize this congregation into a multiplying church again?

No matter what it is, it first and foremost demands our having faith in Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord. It demands that we trust Him to walk with us and guide us so that we see the opportunities before us and then put our faith into action to make it happen. It demands that we go beyond ourselves and look to the power and strength and wisdom of the Lord Jesus.

God delights in our being faithful to Him, and He promises that if we are faithful to obey the commands He gives to us, "*to love the Lord our God and to serve Him with all our heart and with all our soul*" (Deut. 11:13), then He will be pleased to shower us with His blessings, too. He will provide an abundance for us so that we might prosper here in this place and find His joy and peace and kindness such that all people will see it and desire to find Him in their lives, too.

But the warning comes along with the promise. "*Be careful, or you will be enticed to turn away and worship other gods and bow down to them. Then the Lord's anger will burn against you, and He will shut up the heavens*" (Deut. 11:16), and He will remove His hand of blessing on us and we will no longer find ourselves here in this place.

I am convinced that God has not brought us this far to abandon us and have us fail. Yet He calls out to us to have faith, mustard seed sized faith, so that we might stay true to Him and be delighted to

strive to follow Him in all that we do. God calls us to trust in Him with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength and let Him be the only God of our lives. He calls us to have faith in Jesus such that we can do the impossible for Him.

He invites us to be just like the bumble bee in our faith. When you look at the bumble bee from a physics mindset, it is impossible for the bumble bee to fly. The bee's body is too big and the wings are too small for it to possibly produce enough lift to take it into the air. But the bee doesn't know physics. It doesn't know that by all practical purposes, it shouldn't be able to get off the ground, no matter how hard it flutters its wings. It just does what God designed it to do - it flies by faith, trusting that God has made it just right to do what God has called it to do. There's no doubt in its ability. It just takes God at His word and goes out to pollinate flowers for His glory.

If the bumble bee can live by faith and do what God calls it to do, why can't we do the same thing? *“Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to Him, and He will make your paths straight”* (Proverbs 3:5-6).

Put your asterisk sized faith into action. Follow the commands of the Lord our God, trust the Lord Jesus to guide you, and let the Holy Spirit work through you, and watch what can be done through your faith.

Let's pray. Father, it is so easy for us to want to live by sight and not by faith. It is so easy for us to give up when the impossible comes our way. It can be so easy for us to doubt in Your presence and Your power that we lose the ability to do great things for you. Forgive us, Lord! As the disciples asked, *“Increase our faith”* too, so that we might not be afraid to live as Your people, but instead courageously follow Your guidance and do Your work. Help us to fall in love with You so much that we know beyond a shadow of a doubt that *“we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us”* (Philippians 4:13). Then, as we trust in You and follow Your commands, bless us abundantly so that we might prosper here and shine the Light of Jesus Christ all around us, that all people might come to know Jesus as their Lord and Savior, too. This we pray in the powerful Name of Jesus Christ. AMEN!