

Sermon – Year C Proper 22
Lamentations 1.1-6 or Habakkuk 1.1-4, 2:1-4; Psalm Canticle A Song of Waiting or Psalm 137 or
Psalm 37.1-10; 2 Timothy 1.1-14; Luke 17.5-10

“Give us more faith,” the disciples ask, after hearing about the importance of forgiving one who asks for forgiveness; seventy times seven.

Perhaps they are saying, “Give us more faith so that we can do the same, be more forgiving”. Jesus then explains to them that just a wee bit of faith can move trees ... telling them that faith is about quality of life, not quantity of life. Faith is expected.

Well then, what *is* faith? How does it look from where you sit this morning? Very simply, it is the relationship we have with God and how we live into that relationship by obeying and following The Word that God has provided for us. We are called to be good and to do good ... for God’s sake and for our neighbor’s.

And what happens when we do have faith and obey our understanding of that word, the smallest, youngest, weakest of us can do extraordinary things! And, each time we do these extraordinary things our faith increases ... our quality of life is dramatically changed.

As one of my colleagues has shared this week, “Jesus is telling them They have all the faith they need. Don’t ask for more. Use the faith you have. Use it or lose it. ... We are here for one reason...to be an active witness to Christ’s love in the world; loving God; loving neighbor. We were never meant to be inert, couch-potato Christians asking Jesus for a fresh order of faith before we can stir ourselves to follow him. In Baptism we get a life-time supply. It is up to us to keep the tank topped-off. Faith evaporates when it is idle. It multiplies when it is active. Jesus tells us we’re meant to grow it, show it and share it.”¹

When I began my seminary experience, I was blessed in that my first course was a three-week pilgrimage to Greece, following the footsteps of Paul. I did not know any of my traveling companions. One night I was sitting with a couple, she the seminarian, he a local dentist. They were asking me how I felt called to do what I was doing at this time of my life. I shared with them my story about the call. Afterwards there was a considerable silence. (I always hesitate to tell my story

¹ Sellery, David, writing for the Episcopal Café the week of 10/01/13

because sometimes I think people will think I'm crazy!). He, the dentist, broke the silence. He turned to his wife and said, "She's scary."

Years later, I had heard from his wife, Sharon that he had given up his dentistry to volunteer his profession in third world countries. They now travel to all parts of the globe and have become servants of those in need, wherever and whenever. Talk about scary!

When we have a modicum of faith ... the size of a mustard seed ... all things are possible. In a Vestry Paper I read, "Generosity is a gift of the Spirit and is part of the package," referring to wholehearted stewardship ... offering time, talent and money to God's work. Angela Emerson went on to say, "When the spirit takes over our lives we are truly made into new people with a new relationship to God, each other, the earth, our gifts and skills, and our relationship to material abundance. Generosity can be a scary thing because it opens the door to the Spirit and when the Spirit leads, we may go in a direction that we would never have chosen for ourselves."²

Faith moved Sharon's dentist husband to even greater service.#

² Emerson, Angela, "Wholehearted Stewardship" *Vestry Papers*, October 5, 2013, online source

At the bedside of Agnes Jensen, resident of Westminster Canterbury now departed from this world, I heard yet another story of faith. I found out from Agnes' daughter that, in her own words, "My family was the poorest of all the relatives and had the smallest house, yet mom was the one who always, faithfully, took our elders for their end of life care. Agnes, tiny Agnes, who was a teacher, a counselor and then a school administrator in Tennessee. Little Agnes, during the 70s was single-handedly responsible for the establishment of a program to allow unwed teens the opportunity to continue their educations. She opened the hearts of the leaders of the school systems even to the offering of day care for the babies of young women. #

Jesus tells us this morning that by responding to God's love with faith through works, we are merely doing God's bidding. Nothing more. Nothing less. We are doing what is expected of us.

And my friend David, in yet another of his meditations this week shared this thought: "When it comes to God's Kingdom, none of us are in management. All of us are servants. It seems that what we need in our community of faith is not more of us on committees and boards making

decisions, but more of us feeding the hungry, caring for the abandoned, supporting single-family parents, giving guidance to our young, and caring for the needy. #

We think we need more faith?

Maybe not!

Maybe all we need is the courage to use more of what God has already so generously, lovingly, placed in our hands.”³

What David described, in Saturday morning’s musings was the direction of the *new* Episcopal Church. The Missional Church ... whereby we are called out of this sanctuary into the streets ... to do God’s will and to be God’s word to those who need us. To ask the community how we can serve by asking what they need rather than telling them what we think they need.

It makes me wonder, what might that look like for this church ... here in this beautiful neighborhood and community surrounding us?

Perhaps it means establishing a relationship with a school. We need to see who with that school system needs help ... back packs,

³ Sellery, David, Saturday morning’s meditation on *Facebook*, October 5, 2013.

winter coats, gloves and mittens, tutoring, after-school help, teacher support. We have already begun to reach out with our “welcome back to school” ministry a few weeks back that brought surprise, joy and delight to both children and parents as well as to those of us serving. An initial call has already been made to the new principal of Lincoln School (and to River School where Sharon Reed teaches) to find out where we might be Jesus’ hands and feet and heart in serving unmet needs. We are exploring the needs of immigrants in our area. We are in the mustard seed phase of beginning community relationships with those we do not yet know.

Perhaps it means seeking and serving people in need, helping someone just out of prison to find work so that he/she doesn’t return to the life of crime they now wish to give up in order to survive.

Perhaps it means joining with other churches to become the impetus for resolving any number of community issues ... or at least ... making a dent in them, much like St. Peter’s a church of only 26 families as they led the community, including other churches in Altavista when they established Frannie’s House for the victims of

domestic violence. Much like the meeting this past Tuesday to see how we could support a Ukrainian refugee moving to our area.

The list goes on.

The harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few. #

Where is your faith leading you today? Imagine holding a mustard seed, can you feel it vibrating in your hand ... moving you to action?

Where might it be leading St. Paul's in the future?

Faith makes all things whole.

It can move mountains, if only we will let it.

In the name of our creator, redeemer and sustainer. Amen.