

Pentecost 19  
Proper 22  
October 7, 2007  
The Rev. David W. Lovelace

The apostles said to Jesus, "Increase our faith." They seem to think more is better. Luke suggests the disciples think of themselves as just ordinary Christians, so if they had more faith then they could be special or even saints.

The same words are used today. We all want more. It is not really important what it is - we want bigger, better, newer, faster - having the most, the best, distinguishes us as special. There is so much we do that feeds our need to be special, so much that pushes us to be better than anyone else. Right now in the realm of sport everyone is trying to be the best. College football is focused on the prize of a bowl bid come January. The National Hockey League is gearing up for a new season. Then, of course, many of us had hoped that we would be seeing the Phillies in the World Series. Everyone is trying to get to the top. That is where the money is made, the accolades given. I hear children talking about being in the right league, wearing the right clothes, having the correct logo all to be accepted and not rejected by their peers.

Sometimes it is tempting to look at life in much the same way. The address where we live, the car we drive, the clothes we wear, the people we associate with, where we shop are all part of the same game. We want to be among those on top, we don't want to be associated with those perceived to be on the bottom. We want to be special. We want to be distinguished from the run of the mill. We want to be the one with the most that others envy.

There is even a temptation to look at faith this way. We have this idea that saints are at the top, there are some more "religious" people just below them and then there are the rest of us ordinary lower ranking followers. I have even heard that as an excuse. "Oh, I don't have the faith to teach Sunday School or lead a Bible study, or work on a particular project or serve as a leader in the parish."

It is all too easy to say I only have a little faith, so I can get off the hook for that which I am called to do and to be as a Christian. There is the temptation to believe it takes a person of enormous faith to fulfill the covenant we all speak at baptism.

That is the very attitude Jesus is challenging when he answers his disciples. "If you had faith the size of a mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it would obey you."

Who would ever want to plant a mulberry tree in the sea? That is not the point. Jesus is saying, "The glass is not empty. The faith you have is enough. It is big enough to connect you to the power of God, big enough to work wonders, big enough to produce results you cannot imagine or do not know. Trust the faith that is in you. You have what you need."

The gospel this morning invites us to take hold of whatever faith we think we have, we all do have faith or we would not be here, affirm it, give thanks for the gift of faith and use it. Live out your faith. With clarity and assurance live as a follower of Jesus. In the words of Second Timothy, "rekindle the gift from God that is within you, for God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self discipline. That is faith God has planted in us.

The faith we have is all we need to be God's people. We don't need more, we need to trust what we have. Faith makes us the church. We are simply asked to follow: to do our part to share that which we believe.

Faith invites us to see the world through a different lens. Faith challenges us to believe we can make a difference and then to get busy and do it. We can order the mountains of hate to leave our lives. We can order fear to be uprooted and thrown into the sea of hope. We can demand respect and dignity for all people. Faith, God's gift to each one of us, makes it possible.

Often what holds us back is a lack of imagine and trust. There is a story told of a faithful man who came to a town where there was little to eat. There was, however, a farmer in the town with a wagon filled with pears. He wanted so much money for one pear, that the poor people could not afford to eat. They crowded around the wagon and begged the farmer to be reasonable. That just annoyed the farmer.

"Give me one pear," the old man said to the farmer.

"Why should I do that?" the farmer replied.

"One pear," the old man said, "I will share it with all these people and they will no longer hunger. One pear and they will leave you alone."

The farmer laughed. He thought it was a good joke so he threw the old man a pear. The old man sat down and slowly ate the pear. Carefully he picked out the seeds. Then he dug a hole right in front of the farmer's wagon and planted the seeds.

All the poor people watched as he walked to the river and bought back water. Very carefully he poured the water on the spot where he planted the seeds. A great tree began to emerge.

The people watched in astonishment. As everyone watched the tree burst into blossom and soon was covered with fruit. People excitedly picked pears and ate them. The farmer ate his fill as well. When the pears were all gone the old man got an axe. He chopped the tree down and went on his way dragging the tree.

After he was gone for a few minutes the effect of his spell faded the farmer turned to see his wagon empty of pears and the tongue of the wagon chopped off.

Just then a man traveling home to the village came up. "I just saw the strangest thing. An old man passed me on the road. He was carrying a wagon tongue, which he threw into the woods and laughing went on his way."

Some pear seeds, or mustard seeds to draw upon the gospel, when used properly can lead to astonishing results. Most of the time we long for faith to act for God, but God has already given us the gift of faith. It takes some effort on our part to use the gift. It takes nourishing that faith within by regular participation with other faith filled people. It takes trusting that God can work through you and me.

It takes imagination and vision to act.

Jesus suggests we think too little of ourselves. Don't be like the servant who thinks there is nothing else to do or because I have done my part I am off the hook. Look more carefully, listen more intently, get in touch with what is going on around you and imagine what is possible if you just act on your faith!