

Rev. Jennifer Peters McCurry
Emanuel's Lutheran Church, Bellevue (Pittsburgh), PA
October 3, 2010 • 19th Sunday after Pentecost

Habakkuk 1:1-4, 2:1-4
2 Timothy 1:1-14
Luke 17:5-10

Sometimes it can seem like our faith is not enough. We may feel overwhelmed by our or our church's problems. It's easy to be overwhelmed by how to respond to a world filled with injustice and pain. We see people who are hungry or in great need, outside our own doors and in pictures from around the world. Perhaps we question our beliefs, or feel disillusioned with the Christian life. At these times, it may seem like our faith can't stand up to the challenges or difficulties of life. What do you do at these moments in your life?



Jesus' disciples may be having these kinds of experiences when they spoke in our lesson today. They said to Jesus, "Increase our faith!" (*Lk 17:5*) He could have responded much differently. He could have blamed them for their inadequate beliefs. Jesus could also have purposefully made them feel guilty any doubts or uncertainties that they had.

Instead, Jesus painted for them a picture of how the size of one's faith corresponds to the life of a disciple. Faith the size of a tiny mustard seed is plenty!

That small amount of faith is more than enough to move giant mulberry bushes.
That little faith is a sufficient vehicle to receive God's gifts and love and power.

The epistle of 2 Timothy talks about this same idea from a different perspective. Toward the end of Paul's life, he, or someone writing under his name, wrote to Timothy. The author wrote to encourage Timothy in his life of faith and ministry. He recalls Timothy's "sincere faith" (*2 Tim 1:5*) which you notice doesn't comment on amount at all. God brought it to him through Timothy's grandmother, Lois, and his mother, Eunice.

Paul reminds him to "rekindle the gift of God that is within you" – which he received "through the laying on of [Paul's] hands." (*2 Tim 1:6*) Since we are talking about apostles, we may assume that this was a laying on of hands, like at pastoral ordinations. Yet we have all received prayers with the laying on of hands many times in our lives – at our baptisms and confirmations, when we were received as new members in a congregation, or during prayers of healing. We, too, have been "saved... and called... with a holy calling, not according to our works but according to his own purpose and grace." (*2 Tim 1:9*)



With the disciples, and with Timothy, our scriptures invite us to turn to the gift of faith that we have already received. It doesn't matter if it's just the size of a

mustard seed, or even when we doubt that our faith is enough. “[F]or God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline.” (2 Tim. 1:7) This “spirit” that we have received is a gift of the Holy Spirit, and a reflection of God’s very self. We have been given gifts of power and of love and of self-discipline. In the blessing of Christ’s Spirit, God has become a real and present part of our lives.

Part of God’s blessing is our call, as baptized Christians. We are invited and empowered to live as Christ-bearers in the world. We are God’s priests or ministers, sharing Christ’s abundant vision of life with others.

Through the blessings of the Spirit, our eyes are transformed to see the world around us with eyes more like God’s eyes. We see the hunger and hurting, loneliness and pain. And God empowers us with truth and humility, to recognize the truth of the brokenness around us, and in us. This gift helps us to see the redemptive truth of Christ’s whole life. In him, God reached out to our hurting world, to show us all what true life could be for humanity.

Of course, it was hard for us to see and understand, and in our sin, we rejected it. Yet the power of the love of God can not be contained, not even when human sin tried its best. In Christ, death was still overcome. And now, our sin still tries to foil God’s plans. Somehow, God’s Spirit blesses even amid the sin and brokenness of

our world. Transforming hatred into love – transforming death into life – empowering us to forgive even when we’re hurt or grumpy or don’t feel ready.

Through the blessings of the Spirit, God strengthens us with courage to stand alongside one another in companionship, even when we don’t have the solutions or the answers. We reach out in love and friendship – to visit the sick and the lonely, to reach out with words and acts of kindness – and are blessed in unexpected ways. We share ourselves with those in need. Many of you do this personally, through your volunteer work with Meals On Wheels, with scouts or school organizations, at the Troy Hill community night, or simply by visiting neighbors.

As a congregation, Emanuel’s shares with the world through our October food drive. We are gathering food for our local pantry at North Hills Community Outreach – the bulletin or newsletter both have more information. We’re doing the same today as we walk and contribute to the North Boros CROP Walk for Hunger.



Many of us are living our “holy calling.” Yet Jesus reminds us today that God’s gift of faith is incredibly powerful, even if it appears small to us. It’s not about what we bring to the table. Our questions or our doubts? They are welcome. Our intellectual commitments? Our fears? God isn’t shaken by them. Our

limitations and inadequacies? They are a part of our wonderful humanity, which God calls and blesses, in Christ.

But the determining factor, the point of it all, is the gift that we have received - the faith of Christ, given to us when we joined to him in baptism. In that moment, God claimed all of us – every ounce of wonderful creation of God’s image, along with every ounce of disappointing sin. We will all have our struggles or our questions or our overwhelmed times in faith.

The Word speaks to us, and gives us counsel. When we think we don’t have enough, Jesus says we have plenty. When the flame of our faith seems to be flickering, Paul invites us to rekindle God’s gifts within us. It is like the song that we sing in worship – return to the Lord our God, the source of our faith, in the ways that we experience God’s presence. We draw close today to receive Christ’s presence in the word and at table, in prayer and in holy relationships. These disciplines of the faith bring the presence of God’s powerful Spirit. These disciplines of the faith are transforming gifts for our daily lives, if we would accept them.

We may think our faith is too small, and that we should hide. Yet God invites us closer, that we may see and hear, touch and believe. Amen.