

**Christ Church Episcopal in Harwich Port, MA**  
**Sermon for October 6, 2013**                      **Judith Davis, Rector**  
**Luke 17:5-10**

“Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart.” Amen.

The apostles said to Jesus, “increase our faith.”

How many times have we said the same thing? How many times have you prayed prayers like these:

Increase my faith so I will have more patience with people who challenge me and make my life difficult.

Increase my faith so I can accept the trials of life.

Increase my faith because each day is really just too hard for me.

Increase my faith when I don't know how I'll make it to payday.

Increase my faith that I can get a job.

Increase my faith in tomorrow.

Increase my faith that my house will sell.

Increase my faith in the good in people.

I could go on and on with prayers like these. Maybe it doesn't occur to you that being a good friend, or working at jobs to keep food on the table or keep the world running, or any of the other ordinary stuff we do every day has anything to do with the Christian faith. It just doesn't occur to us sometimes. We think acts of faith are big things, not the day-to-day things we do.

So, let's think about this past week. I know that some of you hosted or led fireside chats. I know that many of you polished brass yesterday. I know one of you took communion to another and others took flowers to brighten someone's day. I know that some of you gave rides to other parishioners this week and some of you sat and listened to a friend. I know someone who took meals-on-wheels to others and someone who took another to a medical appointment. I know someone else who helped clean house for a friend.

So in all of these seemingly small things were just doing your job as a Christian. Instead of worrying about why you don't have more faith, you acted on your faith and your beliefs.

- Imagine what the previous week would have been like if all those things hadn't gotten done.
- Then imagine what the world would look like next week if more people, granted a sense that even their ordinary acts are being used by God to care for God's world, felt empowered and commissioned to do even more.

I think that would be awesome.

What do we really mean when we pray to have more faith? The disciples wondered about this.

And so Jesus tells his disciples -- both his disciples in the first century and those of us who are his disciples now -- that we've got all that we need to be faithful, and that being faithful, finally, is about recognizing all the God-given opportunities just to show up and do what needs to be done:

- doing our work
- protecting the vulnerable
- befriending the friendless
- contributing to the common good.
- caring for those in need
- reaching out to the lonely
- keeping the world going

It's all the ordinary stuff we do all the time and, taken together and blessed by God, it's pretty extraordinary. Faith is having the courage to keep going toward a future we do see yet. Faith is heading out the door each day looking for opportunities to be God's partner and co-worker in the world. Faith is imagining that the various challenges put in front of us --are actually opportunities that invite us to grow as disciples and witness to God's presence and goodness in the world.

So yesterday we did a blessing of the animals at Red River Beach. It was an experiment in taking church to the people. It was fun. I loved blessing each of those dogs and the one very brave cat named Clancy. I loved being with those who came, and I even blessed a few shore birds as they flew over us. I think it brightened the day of those who came. A friend who took some photos at the blessing here at the church posted them on Facebook. One of his friends said, "Communion with Milk bones?" I said that communion with Milk bones was fine with me.

It was just ordinary to hold those services and I felt blessed by those who were there, even Wally, my neighbor Shelia's dog. Sheila is a retired police officer from Boston. Wally is a wonderful therapy dog and visits area nursing homes. It's his way of being faithful. Wally was excited about the Milk bones. I thought of how some of you have rescued animals and brought them into your homes and lives and how each day you provide some act of faithfulness in caring for them.

So Jesus gives the disciples the idea that just doing their job, just caring for others, just doing the ordinary day-in-and-day-out is responding in faith. What is faith anyway? Faith is "the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen," says the *Letter to the Hebrews* (11:1).

Faith is not being sure where you're going, but going anyway on a journey without maps or a GPS or even a nagging spouse giving you directions. Paul Tillich said that doubt isn't the opposite of faith; it is an element of faith. Doubt is important. Faith is not certainty. Faith is hope that somehow the things you hope for and cannot see might come to pass. It's like

planting seeds in the spring and hoping vegetables will grow from them, even when we cannot see the growth yet.

This passage from Luke is very short but it gives us an idea of what discipleship and faith are. Discipleship is about doing your duty. Remember that Jesus came among us as one who serves, and so as his followers we are servants, too. As we read the parables it's clear that discipleship occurs within community, within a community of faith like ours. To be a disciple is to be more than simply a member of an organization, but also to follow the master, who is Christ (who also comes to us as servant); and so the life of faith is simply doing one's duty to God and to God's people. I think these are some important points from looking at this lesson in Luke:

- First, we are tempted to turn faith into something complex. Something you need to become an “expert” at--A never ending quest to get more and more, better and better. Jesus tells the disciples that faith is simple. You just need a little to move mountains.
- Second, this temptation to obsess over faith can become a distraction to the kind of faith that Jesus actually teaches. The faith of Jesus is about loving God and loving neighbor, not about getting more and more of something for yourself.
- Third, when it comes to faith, sometimes we just need a tiny amount. Why? Because faith is powerful. It only takes a small light to pierce the darkness, and God doesn't require us to be a spiritual master to move in us, do things with us, or love us.<sup>1</sup>

I remember when I first came to Christ Church five years ago we had embarked on building a Habitat for Humanity home. We needed volunteers. My dad had taught me a little basic carpentry and I could drive a 20 penny nail without hitting my thumb. I was excited about the project and so, with my new Benny's pink Red Sox hammer, I just showed up to work. Almost all the time that I went to the site to help with construction, it rained. But I kept showing up, driving those nails, raising walls, surprising

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.rickmorley.com/archives/2761>

even myself with what I could do, and as we all worked together, we built a home for a family. It didn't take extraordinary skill; it took showing up and being faithful. Now we have the opportunity to be a part of the Apostle's Build in Orleans. Just do it and be surprised by the effect it has on you.

Faith is keeping on keeping on. We have all the faith we need. We just need sometimes to act on it and do what God has called us to do. When the 12 founding women of this parish had faith that they could establish a church, they just did ordinary things—serving a ham and bean supper, holding a bake sale, having a bazaar, asking a friend to help fund their project, and their work, day-in and day-out, paid off, and even in no time the church was paid for.

We had faith in our annual pledge drive that we can sustain this church over the long haul. Remembering the work and faith of ordinary women with an extraordinary vision, we prayed about how to secure our future. We increased our pledges and had faith that we could pay them. We keep moving forward, believing we are doing the right thing and having faith that God will guide us as we go along. And so this story of the mustard seed faith reminds me of one of my favorite prayers about faith. I've shared it before because it works for me. It's Thomas Merton's prayer from his book *Thoughts in Solitude*, written in 1956. Let me conclude with it:

“My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think that I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing. I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire. And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road though I may know nothing about it. Therefore will I trust you always though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.”<sup>2</sup> Amen.

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<sup>2</sup> Thomas Merton, *Thoughts in Solitude*, Farar, Straus and Giroux, 1956, p. 82