



“Gimme, gimme!”

Luke 17: 5-10

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Julie’s heart felt like it would burst as she watched her little girl Samantha delight in all that Disney World had to offer. They got soaked on the log flume, ate a funnel cake, heard little creatures singing “It’s a Small World After All”, and even bumped into Snow White who gave them a hug and her autograph as they headed out of the park. “Ahhh, what a perfect day” Julie thought. And after a moment she confessed to herself, “It should be perfect, after I scrimped, saved and sacrificed for two years to make this special trip with my little Samantha possible.” They boarded the tram to the parking lot with another young family. The boy was holding a Buzz Light Year action figure and the girl had Woody. Little Samantha turned to her mom with a big, sweet smile on her face and said, *“Mom, thank you for all of your sacrifices. I know you put so much into making this day special for me. I love you. Tell me, how can I make you happy? How can I sincerely appreciate what you’ve given to me and use those gifts to make things better in this world?”*

No one grounded in reality listening to this sermon this morning is going to believe for one minute that’s what Samantha said. Of course not. This is America in 2016 and Samantha is a regular, human child. Samantha has been given the world and instead of saying thank you and asking how she can respond in love Samantha says, *“Mom! Pleeeeease can I get Mrs. Potato Head! I want Mrs. Potato Head now! Those kids have Woody and Buzz! I want a Toy Story action figure too! Pleeaaaaaase????!! It’s not fair!!!! I want moooooore!!!!”*

In the chapters just before this morning’s Luke 17 passage, Jesus tells the story of a shepherd searching for his one lost sheep, a woman looking high and low for the single lost coin and about a father welcoming home his prodigal son. Jesus tells each of these parables to illustrate that God values us. God will search high and low and leave no stone unturned for us. God celebrates reconciliation even after we have made a million mistakes. Like Julie, the Disney mom, God lavishes us with love and yet in chapter 17 the disciples want even more. They say, “Increase our faith!” There’s no “please,” or “would it be possible,” and certainly no “thank you for allowing us to simply be in your presence.”

Here is the thing with disciples, Jesus’ followers from 2000 years ago and many of us today. We have so much and often we don’t recognize it. Instead of saying “thank you” and “how can I respond to all you give me?” we say, “Give me more!” We ask for more instead of doing

something with what we have already been given. And we have already been given faith. Sometimes we just don't know we have it in us.

Shortly after my husband and I were married, we went to dinner with a group of people that included my sister Betsy. That dinner is now a standard family story and I'll tell it the way my husband Billy chooses to tell it. One of our shared appetizer plates at this hip Buckhead restaurant had a small piece of a fried vegetable left on it. Billy pointed to it and asked, "What is this?" Sister Betsy replied "It's a piece of zucchini" so Billy popped it into his mouth. As the tears began to flow down Billy's face and his eyes threatened to pop out of their sockets, we realized it was not a piece of zucchini but a jalapeño pepper. Did I mention my husband does not like spicy food? That little vegetable had a giant bite. Because of the ridiculous pantomimes, hand gestures and facial contortions Billy was making, we laughed for the next 30 minutes . . . and continue to laugh at that story 30 years later.

Mustard seeds have something in common with jalapeños. They are little, itty bitty things with a big bite. I thought about giving out mustard seeds instead of jelly beans during the children's sermon today. Do you think that would have gone over well? Theologian John Trapp says the mustard seed is "small and low but also sharp and lively." Football fans who watch slot receivers Troy Edelman and Wes Welker know someone small can pack a giant wallop. Jalapeños, 5 foot nine inch NFL receivers and mustard seeds come in small packages but make a giant impact. And so it goes with faith. We don't need a big giant package of faith. We just need a little bit of faith, a smidge tucked away in the furthest corner of our hearts, and we can change the world.

If your faith is giant, enormous, immeasurable, I am so very happy for you. For many, faith waxes and wanes. When your new baby is born healthy it feels natural to bubble over with faith in a loving God of abundance. When the choir harmonies swell to a crescendo during the Christmas program, my faith becomes visible in the form of chill bumps all over my arms.

Sometimes, though, faith can feel thinner, smaller, even too tiny to grasp between two fingers. When your dear friend is lying in a hospital bed suffering, when you realize you're having another miscarriage, when you hear "you're not a good fit for this job" for the 20th time, faith can be elusive. During those times even God's holy word, the encouraging rhetoric of Paul's letters ("Have faith!") can ring hollow. Prayers seem like they are floating up to nothingness. In those tough times we don't think to say "please" or "thank you" or "I appreciate simply being in your presence" to God. We often just demand, "Give me more faith!"

Hear the good news this morning: each of us already has enough faith. Faith is in us whether we are aware of it or not. Paul's letter to the Ephesians says, "[F]aith . . . is not your own doing; it is the gift of God."¹

¹ See Ephesians 2: 8-10

Here's the imperative from Jesus Christ: don't just have faith and then wish and hope all will work out: act on it. It is our Christian calling to step out on faith. Yes, we are God's chosen people: chosen to receive God's gifts and chosen to do something with them! In this passage Jesus tells us that if we would just tap a mustard seed's size of faith we could pull up a deeply rooted tree and move it into the sea. In other words, our faith can turn the world order upside down.

Stepping out on faith is HARD. I admit I often find myself suppressing that imperative to act because—well, because I don't want to be embarrassed, don't want to upset the status quo, or I don't want to be in harm's way. I am more apt to "like" a call for change on Facebook than to take real steps toward making change a reality. This illustration cuts me to the quick:



It's pretty easy to "like" a social media post and hope that makes a difference. But hoping for change isn't what Christ calls us to do. Christ calls us to move mountains and turn the world upside down so our world more closely reflects the Kingdom of God.

What does a world order turned upside down look like in 2016? Scripture says directly, "All things are possible for the one who has faith."² A tree growing in the sea would still be a shock. What about other impossibilities we can imagine? 75 years ago we thought it was impossible for a person to walk on the moon. 20 years ago it was impossible to take a photo in Japan and share it instantly with someone in New Zealand. While I trust Jesus Christ affirms us using the brains that God gave us to make the impossible possible through science and discovery, I hear him asking more of us in this passage. Jesus is calling for what still today seems impossible: all of God's children to be treated with love and respect. Everyone, no exceptions.

Jesus spent his time elevating and educating and advocating for those being treated as "lesser than." The whole gospel of Luke is God saying plainly, "Blessed are the invisible, the persecuted, those without power--and woe to those who don't help them." Here's an illustration of people acting on faith to turn the world upside down that hits close to home: in 1950 women speaking

² Mark 9: 23 (CEB)

in church was impossible. And now here I am, an ordained woman preaching in this pulpit. It took some folks speaking up, acting out and trusting their faith and a power shift did happen. Hey--I LIKE this shift! What can we do next?

How about moving from a binary world of black or white to a richer world of many colors, many cultures, many people. How about gathering around this World Communion table as one people, appreciating our differences, respecting one another, acknowledging that that “my way” is not “the way.”

Martin Luther King Jr.’s 1963 “Letters from a Birmingham Jail” is written to me, the white moderate, in 2016.³ He writes to all of us. He laments that he has “almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the greatest stumbling block . . . toward freedom is not the . . . KKK, but the white moderate, who is more devoted to “order” than to justice.” He explains, “Shallow understanding from people of good will is more frustrating than absolute misunderstanding from people of ill will.” Shallow understanding comes from living in a bubble and not being in communion with people different than ourselves. Shallow understanding can deepen only when we begin a conversation, when we break bread together, when we read a book written from another’s perspective, when we embed ourselves—even if only for a few hours—in another person’s world.

What does it look like, as it says in verse 10, to have “done what we ought to have done?” How do we get there? Last week our JOY group (Just Older Youth) discussed the importance of expressing our Christian views through writing letters to the editor. Last week our church book group discussed *A Life in Red*, and got a glimpse inside the indignities and deprivation of rights African Americans have suffered in the South. Maybe you’ve heard of a good book like that to read that will stretch your mind—go for it! The news reports peaceful and not-so-peaceful demonstrations taking place in the streets of our cities. Go march . . . or stand . . . or hand out water to the demonstrators and the public servants trying to keep the peace. Stop by Rainbow Village or Salt/Light Center and offer to tutor after school twice a month or read to the little ones. Say a warm hello in the grocery store to the couple who doesn’t look like you. Point out racism, sexism, any “ism” to your children. Pray for justice. Actively seek opportunities to move from passive white moderate –or however you self-identify—to active.

God has put faith in us. Let’s stop asking God for more faith and instead pray that God opens our eyes to opportunities to act on the faith we’ve been given. “Repent” means literally “to turn.” As in turn this world upside down. Perhaps today we confess, repent, take communion from this colorful table and leave this place of worship committed to tapping our tiny bit of faith and putting it into action. How rich to be able to say to God not “Gimme, gimme!” but instead to say “We have done only what we ought to have done!”

Amen.

³ Martin Luther King, Jr. “Letters from a Birmingham Jail” April 16, 1963.