

How Much Faith is Enough?

Rev. Nancy Willet
July 4, 2010

Luke 17:1-6

First Presbyterian Church
Uvalde, TX

We've probably all heard the slogan "super-size me," I would guess. In our culture today, bigger is better, more is a good thing, and super-sized is great! Why get a little 10-ounce drink when you can get a Big-Gulp for the same price?

Well, you may say that I am no expert on this, and I don't claim to be—I don't even claim to practice what I preach here, but we know that obesity in America has increased dramatically over the last decade, and studies have shown larger, super-sized drinks and French fries are one of the big culprits.

Our gospel lesson for today does away with the super-size notion, altogether. In our lesson today, in vs. 5 we read about the apostles asking Jesus to increase their faith. They want to super-size it if you will. Why did the disciples all of a sudden think they needed more faith? Wasn't the faith they had enough?

We need to go back to verse 4 to understand their urgent plea for the super-size me request for more faith. Jesus had just asked the disciples to do something they knew they could not do. He tells them, "If a person sins against you seven times a day and turns back to you seven times and says, 'I repent,' you must forgive."

Seven times in one day! You've got to be kidding, they must've been thinking! They have done what is reasonable, and even exceptional to follow Jesus already. They left their jobs and their homes to travel with Jesus, but now he is beginning to ask impossible tasks of them, and they don't know how to do them.

The disciples have hit that brick wall we all sometimes face, where we have no idea what to do next. They want Jesus to give them the super-sized faith necessary to do all this forgiving, because they know that that is not *naturally* something that is in their hearts to do. It'd be nice just to have this neat little manual from Jesus that offers clear-cut steps to being a good disciple, wouldn't it?

In short, the disciples want to be transformed—they want to be made into what Jesus wants them to be, but **they don't really believe they can be**. They have become so accustomed to seeing their world as they see it, that they cannot even imagine seeing the world the way God wants it to be. They are so used to seeing their enemies as villains, they are having a hard time seeing them as a brother or sister.

It's so easy for us all to put people into categories. Good or bad, a believer or a non-believer, rich or poor, a republican or a democrat, a liberal

or a conservative. Just ask someone one of the hot button questions of the day—gun control, abortion, gay marriage—and immediately, when they answer, you think you know who the other person is.

Once you have that identity, it is hard to believe anything else. If that person answers the opposite of the way you believe, hmmm....something must be wrong with them. They must *really* be a sinner if *that* is the way they think!

Or let's say the person next to you really has committed a sin. One we all know is a sin—not just having a difference of political or moral opinion. Jesus said, "if a person repents seven times in one day, then **we** are to see them as a child of God seven times in one day, too."

Forgiveness is not about whitewashing the past; it's about seeing the present in a **new light** and looking toward a future of redemption. Forgiveness insists that the people are not conservative or liberal, not pro-life or pro-choice, not for gun control or against it. True forgiveness moves us beyond the labels we give people and calls us to see those that have sinned as children of God—just as beloved by our Maker as we are.

No wonder the disciples wanted Jesus to super-size their faith! This is a hard thing to do—and it still is very hard for us today, too. The disciples—like we too often want—wanted Jesus to wave his magic wand and give them more faith—enough faith to do all this forgiving Jesus has commanded them to do.

I think it is interesting that earlier in Luke (9:1-6) Jesus had sent the apostles out with power over demons and diseases. They preached and healed. They went about without any supplies of their own. They had the faith to trust in God for their necessities. They had the faith to heal the sick and cast out demons. They had the faith to proclaim the Kingdom of God. But, they don't have enough faith to forgive? Hmmm...something's wrong with this picture, I think.

The question for today which I would like to pose to you and have you think about is, do you think it was actually *faith* that the disciples were lacking or merely lacking the *obedience* to do what Jesus had asked them?

Well, Jesus in his usual style does *not* wave his magic wand and give them what they want. He tells them a story about a mustard seed and a mulberry tree.

I'll bet most of you know how small a mustard seed it. Maybe some of you don't. And do you know how big Mulberry trees get?

Jesus told the apostles if they have faith the size of this mustard seed, they could say to the mulberry tree, "be uprooted and be planted in the sea, and it would obey you."

The leaf alone of a Mulberry tree, or any tree is much bigger than a little seed, isn't it? Yet, Jesus tells us that if we have faith the size of this mustard seed we could uproot the entire tree and plant it in the sea.

Question number 2 for you today is, "Do you believe that?" Do you have enough faith to uproot a mulberry tree, to move mountains as it is written in the book of Matthew? Just how much faith is enough faith?

We've all had times in our lives when we have had to face mountains—or had deeply rooted issues in our lives we would dearly love to see removed. We pray and pray and pray, and nothing seems to happen—the mountain is not moved, the tree is not uprooted. I would guess we have all questioned if we had enough faith. We probably have all joined in the apostles' plea to "increase our faith!"

You know, though—I don't think the apostles or we need *more* faith, though. We serve a loving, caring God who gives us *everything* we need.

I don't think it's so much a matter of needing *more* faith, but a matter of having the correct faith. Genuine faith consists of trusting *God's* ability—not our own. It's not our prayers that save us, it's not even our *faith* that saves us, but it is **God** that saves.

Ephesians 2:8 says, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God"— Grace and faith—both gifts from God. It's not so much *God give me more faith*, as it is *God help me to trust you in this*. The genuine life of faith consists of trusting God's ability.

As we gather around the communion table today, we are showing our signs of trust. We trust God has control of what is going on in the world. We trust in *God's* ability to stir our hearts during this sacred meal and move us, uproot us to be more faithful disciples. As you partake of the Holy meal in a few moments, take time to give God thanks for the gift of faith and grace you have been given. Trust in the Lord, and remember the words told to the Apostle Paul by God: "My grace is sufficient for you."

I would like to close with this prayer I once read that relates to our message for today. Let us pray: "O God, I don't pray for enough faith to move mountains or uproot trees. I can get enough dynamite and bulldozers and backhoes to do that. What I need and ask for is enough faith to move me—to uproot me from my comfortable-ness and to move me to trust in you completely." Amen.