

For the people of St. Philip's

October 7, 2007

"Do something, quick!"

Luke 17: 5-10

Maria Hoecker , preacher.

There's a familiar story out there about a man who had been lost in the desert. Later, when describing his ordeal to his friends he told how in sheer despair, desperate for water and fearing for his life, he had cried out to God to save him. "And did he?" asked his friends.

"Oh no," the man replied, "before he could an explorer came along and showed me the way out."

Another man cried out in his prayer, "God! Why do you allow this suffering in the world? People are starving, killing each other in your name, poisoning the environment, killing the planet. Why don't you *do* something, quick?" The answer came in a breath, a still small voice, "I *have* done something... I have sent you."

"Lord," the disciples asked, "increase our faith..." Seems like a good enough request – increase our faith that we may be in service to you. And Jesus' response is typically confounding: Faith the size of a mustard seed is all it takes to move mountains. You've got all you need. It's powerful stuff, this faith. A little dab will do ya. It feeds a living, growing faith that works miracles in our world.

In a way, what the disciples asked of Jesus, "Increase our faith" really meant, "Can't you make us more powerful?" Jesus' reply reminds us that it's not about us. I'll repeat what I just said: it's *so* not about us. You don't need a larger faith that will be seen by all. You don't need to be a paragon of virtue, spouting scripture at every turn, loving absolutely, giving ostentatiously. All you need is enough. By God's grace, you have all the faith you need... if you believe.

Imagine a world where every person truly believed, *truly believed*, in the power of God. Not their own power, but God's power. We don't need huge faith; we just need enough. So, instead of sitting back and lamenting that we've got a long way to go on our faith journey, what if we just went ahead and put to use what we've got?

"I *have* done something. I have sent you."

God has responded to a world in crisis: He has sent Christ to dwell amongst us – you and me.

With our imperfect faith we're still learning, taking small steps forward, and big steps backward. Progressing slowly, the way a person bends into the wind. Have you ever seen people walking into a stiff wind? I used to live in western Kansas, where the wind always blows. They like to say out there that one time the wind stopped and everyone fell down. When I used to walk home from elementary school, the prickly tumble weeds would smash into me and I would yell into the incessant wind, "STOP BLOWING!" That's what our faith journey is like. It isn't easy, leaning into the wind, but we do move onward. We are sent to move out into the world.

What can we do out there? What did the apostles do? A lot. Your tiny faith can uproot trees, long standing roots can be lifted right out of the ground. That's what Jesus says.

Specifically, there is pain and suffering in the world. The evil roots of genocide, starvation, earthly devastation, poverty, lack of education are digging in, holding fast from one generation to the next, taking hold. You see its pervasiveness in other parts of the world, in Africa, , Asia, South and Central America. But you also see it in the United States.

Contemplating the chaos in creation is overwhelming. It is too big. It's tempting to retreat into a cocoon. At this moment, as we sit in this place of peace, someone out there in this world is dying, a mother is holding her emaciated baby, watching him take his last few ragged breaths. A father faces the hopelessness of long-term unemployment, a couple is struggling to find shelter for the night. As the sun warms them, they are gathering their things and wondering what their next meal will be, and when, and wondering where they will find shelter tonight.

Another couple is struggling to find a life together as their love unravels in the stresses of a demanding world. Less

obvious, perhaps, a teenager struggles to complete high school, a 'tween is accepting a joint for the first time, someone is dying because she cannot afford medical care.

What can we do. What little amount of difference can our tiny faith have in the world?

Like the apostles, many a contemplative's quest for spirituality involves a quiet hope to receive increased "faith" passively without actively undertaking active work in the world. As the apostles said to the Lord, so many contemplatives on retreat have said throughout time, "Increase our faith!" ...then we'll have more to give.

But Jesus' response insists that a faithful life is neither so passive nor so simple, . It's a matter of doing (v. 10). It's a matter of living in whatever circumstances exist within this kingdom of God (17:21). It's a matter of a neighbor's repentance receiving our forgiveness (17:1-4), time after time after time. It's a matter of living into all that we Christians are ordered to do, and doing so as faithful servants rather than as seekers for our own prizes and rewards (17:7-10). We fulfill our duty to be good neighbors out of devotion to God, not devotion to the accumulated treasures that might be the envy of our neighbors..

Our Christian life is not about us and our fulfillment, it's about God and the fulfillment of God's purposes. Large or small, it's not a matter of "increasing" our faith as the apostles asked Jesus, his reply was that even the smallest seed of faith has power-- Our faith increases by our humility in the face of God's mercy. If we fix our gaze on our enslavement to God, not the idols of this earth, we can fulfill our duty to God with devotion. It's in our humbleness before God that we gain our power.

Our humble prayers: public and private, ultimately lead to the making of "transparent lives." It's that authenticity that faithfully demonstrates God's redemption in this world. Our prayers put to action form a congruence in our lives and community that builds bridges between what we do and what we say. It connects our words and our deeds. The fruit of humble prayer knits together our inner life and the kind of world that we build around us. From a tiny mustard seed grows faith that will uproot evil.

It's October. It's the season where we sit with our Time and Talent Booklets and contemplate sharing our gifts from God. Being stewards of God's Kingdom is a year-round exercise, but in October we sign on the dotted line. Where will our lives of faithful prayer lead us? Where does God call us to take our tiny seeds of faith? How freely will we release them into the soil and trust that they will grow?

I invite you to take some time this month to pray about it. With words and without words, sit in prayer with your awareness of the abundance of God's grace and discern where Christ is calling you to take action . So many thirst for the Good News of a loving God. You can trust that your faith which feels so feeble most days, can uproot lives and re-plant them where their thirst will be quenched with living waters . Grace abounds.

Listen for that small, still voice that says, "*I have done something... I have sent you.*"