

WESTMINSTER
PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH



SERMON

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Seeds of Faith

Rev. Louise Rogers

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Luke 17:5-10

The apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our faith!”⁶ But the Lord said, “If you had faith the size of a mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and be planted in the sea’; and it would obey you.

⁷“Now which of you, having a slave plowing or tending sheep, will say to him after he comes in from the field, ‘Come immediately and recline *at the table* to eat’?⁸ On the contrary, will he not say to him, ‘Prepare something for me to eat, and *properly* clothe yourself and serve me while I eat and drink; and afterward you may eat and drink’?⁹ He does not thank the slave because he did the things which were commanded, does he?¹⁰ So you too, when you do all the things which were commanded you, say, ‘We are unworthy slaves; we have done *only* that which we ought to have done.’”

Mother Teresa of Calcutta, India died as a world-known figure. Who would have ever thought she would have attained such influence when she first began? A tiny woman, she began with the most meager of resources. Mother Teresa told her superiors, “I have three pennies and a dream from God to build an orphanage.” “Dear,” her superiors said, “you can’t build an orphanage with three pennies . . . with three pennies you can’t do anything.” “I know,” she said, smiling, “but with

God and three pennies I can do anything.” Mother Teresa understood the principle of the seed. It takes very little but very little blessed by God and miracles can occur. This, of course, is what Jesus is teaching, that faith only the size of a **mustard seed** can produce amazing results. That is a constant law in God’s world too. The question for us today is; Can we believe it and how do we live with this type of faith?

The disciples of Jesus ask him to increase their faith. The faith they wanted is Christian faith defined in the scriptures as, “the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” Hebrews 11:1 Faith is trust. To have faith in another person, including God, the one who is all powerful, all knowing and loves us completely, is to trust that person to love you and to do what is right for you in every circumstance of life.

This definition is simple, but care needs to be taken so that faith is not oversimplified. Faith is not only the ability to trust God to be our companion when the family has been blessed and all are gathered in good health around the holiday table, but faith is also present in those times when one of the chairs of the family circle is empty by some tragedy in life. Faith is not just the ability to trust God to give us life when we stand in the spring and see signs of life all around us, but also in the winter when the limbs of the trees have been stripped of life and the flowers are dead. Faith is not just the ability to trust God to control the final destiny of the world when there is peace, but also when the storms of war rumble. Faith is a trust in God through all the circumstances of life: good times and

bad times, valleys and mountains, pains and joys. Yes, we too want more faith!

Jesus provided an illustration when speaking about faith. If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, be uprooted and move to the sea and it will obey you. In another gospel, Jesus says to the mountain, “move from here to there and it will move.” Honestly, these teachings can be hard because they can carry sense of judgement. I can pray hard, but the mountains remain stationary. I can pray for that tree to jump but honestly, I have not seen this happen. If it is my weak faith alone that moved the mountain, then the bigger the mountain, the more faith I would need to move it. The bigger the obstacle, the more strength I’d need to climb it. The more serious the illness, a faith even greater would be required to overcome it. That kind of thinking kind of makes sense in our cause-and-effect world. But that’s not how faith works. In fact, faith doesn’t do the work at all. God is the one doing the work through faith.

Think of faith as the key that opens the door to God acting in our lives. If I have a bigger key ring than you do, does it matter? The size of a key ring doesn’t matter. Key rings don’t open doors, but it’s that little key on the ring that opens doors. Even a little faith opens the door for God to move the mountains and trees and even our hearts with God’s love. Jesus implores us to hold on to even the smallest amount of faith.

Faith is God's gift. It is through the goodness and grace of God that we can trust God. God enables us to trust God. This may sound like a vicious cycle, but it is true. The disciples knew this, and that's why they asked Christ to increase their faith. Paul Tillich, the great theologian, defined faith as courage. That is just wonderful. He said that is what faith will look like when you see it. It will look like courage. What faith is, is acting on your trust that God is faithful. Most of the time, if you are doing anything worthwhile, it is done on faith, and it takes courage. Madeleine L'Engel put it perfectly. "I don't have to have some special qualification to do what I have to do. All I have to do is have the courage to go on and do it."

Today we will all share in a gift because of one man acting on his faith. Rev. Dr. Hugh Thomson Kerr was a pastor at Shadyside Presbyterian church. His position allowed him to travel around the country and listen to church members nationwide. He also surveyed the world situation. When he returned home, he was deeply troubled by the totalitarianism he saw in the world. In faith, he came to God asking for a way forward. An idea was formed that led Dr. Kerr to invite others to come join in communion once a year. His vision was to join with Christian across the world to pray for peace, the vulnerable and our lives to live for Christ as we are fed by the bread and cup of Jesus Christ. Today, 90 years later his vision is our reality when we share communion today on world communion Sunday with congregations from around the world. Christians from Pittsburgh, to London to Singapore to

Guam will gather at the table to pray for peace and witness to the Lord. We will join in too.

Friends, living in Christian faith is an adventure. Faith is heading out the door each day looking for opportunities to be God's partner and co-worker in the world. We do not have to be Mother Teresa or Dr. Kerr; we just have to live with faith where we are here and now. This may mean to solve a problem at work or to care for children or grandchildren with love or forgiving someone who wronged us and to see that these are actually opportunities that invite us to grow as disciples and witness to God's presence and goodness in the world. How wonderful to see how God will allow these seeds of faith to grow.



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2040 Washington Road
Pittsburgh, PA 15241
412-835-6630
www.westminster-church.org