

Sermon 6 October 2013
'Living in God's Way' Luke 17:11-19 2 Timothy 2:8-15

Prayer: Holy Spirit, who kindled faith in our ancestors, rekindle that same sincere and powerful faith in us. Inspire us to worship you and to testify to you, gladly and fearlessly, relying on your gift of grace. Amen.

As I read the Gospel for this week, I couldn't help but wonder how many times I have heard the desire of the disciples from individuals; including if I am honest – myself. 'Lord, ***I need more faith*** – ***tell me*** how to get it'. As if somehow whatever is being faced by the individual is going to be solved with an increase in faith!

With the cold light of day and with logic winning the mode of process, we can wonder ***how more*** faith will make the slightest difference; and of course it won't – what's even worse in this situation is that today, even Jesus says – more *faith* is not the answer. Just doing what you've got in front of you and getting on with it ***is*** what is required. But actually I heard a sermon this week on this text and agreed with Roy, that Jesus words can be expanded a little more to say, it's not *more faith* that we need – but to **be more faithful** with what we have.

To take what we have and trust that it is enough, live believing that we have all we need, and wondering aloud – *it is possible* that if we don't have enough, then it is a 'want' not a need we are struggling with. Jesus teaches us today that even the tiniest amount of faith is enough to move mulberry trees. Faith as tiny as a mustard seed is all we need to live God's way. In the Message translation Jesus words are "You don't need more faith. There is no 'more' or 'less' in faith. If you have a bare kernel of faith, say the size of a poppy seed, you could say to this sycamore tree, 'Go jump in the lake,' and it would do it."

There is no 'more or no less' of faith, it is using what we have to do what we must and trusting that it is enough to do the biggest of jobs that we have resting on our shoulders. It is enough to move mountains, so how many of us have moved mountains? How many of us have told mature trees to jump in a lake – and they have? How many of us have got on with the job and learned as we trusted the Lord to be with us, we had enough?

One of the rewards of faithfulness is the discovery of "enough". We don't know ***what*** the occasion was that prompted the disciples to feel out of their depth; to feel that they were not up to the challenge; that it was too much *and if Jesus* could just give them ***a top-up***, all would be well. *And Jesus seems to* be agreeing with them- giving examples of fantastic faith 'proof's' – moving mountains, moving mature trees into the sea / a lake....

Then he moved on to give a traditional servant / slaves job description – how after a full day's work outside the home, the work inside is picked up, the evening meal is made and served – and then the worker can stop. Working parents/ grandparents know the feeling? **But then comes the crunch point.** In Jesus typical way, the ending has the punch of his teaching. The servant is not thanked, he is merely doing his job. And so it is when we do what we are called to "do" for him. Don't make special claims for rewards, for thanks, for being noticed above the ordinary... you have only done what is expected.

There is a shift in the message that would have shocked Jesus listeners as much as it increases tension in us. From associating with the 'Master' – who can arrive home and have their evening meal served – as it should be, why should a servant receive special thanks for doing his job? And then Jesus effectively said '... in my service you are on the same level as servants / slaves, don't expect special treatment for doing your job'.

This teaching works because it subverts the self-satisfaction of the 'Master's' those who see themselves as 'superior'. It brings everyone down to the same level when serving Jesus. What it challenges

is any notion that we achieve value by achieving the good; that we deserve a bonus for being honest, decent, caring human beings. That we can go to Jesus and say – you have to love me because I am being ‘good’, because I am serving well, because I thought of someone else first.... (*Loader) “The passage is probably deliberately offensive in flooring aspirations to human worth based on achievement capital. It is annoying and frustrating, and even seems mean. It gives us no credit.” Cv

As with all passages we should not take this one in isolation and allow it to be the last word of Jesus – because it is not. In the context of the whole Gospel story this passage doesn't mean grovel to a Masterful God, **or** that we have to go around with a false humility saying *we are worth* nothing so that God (and others will like us).... That kind of thinking is **not Jesus teaching** at all, remember he said ‘serve – like me’ and got a towel and washed his disciples feet.

Our place in Jesus kingdom, and our value in God's eyes is not from the size of the job, the ‘worthiness of the task, the level of responsibility... but that we ‘do’ what we have been given to do and that is our reward, as it was for Jesus. Easy to say, easy to think, but **so hard** to accept and live with – **because of our humanity**, and our need for approval, for recognition, for assurance the gift we make of our talents and energies and... in faith...

We are plagued with the question of: ‘What is our value *if it is not* in what we achieve?’ (*Loader) And Jesus says ‘what you do is not where you find your value – you are **loved just as you are**’. There is a place for you at the table **because** God loves you, **and because** God loves you, he sent me to tell you, to make sure you got the message. “... ”

The more we can accept and live God's way – of being loved for **who we are** and not **what we can do**, the **more we can do**! The easier it is to take our mustard seed sized faith and move trees into lakes / seas... Seemingly impossible feats of faith not because we earned it or even worked for it – but because we believe with God anything is possible, even change, simply **because God is with us** – Jesus said so. W Loader has a lovely paragraph: “Seeds of hope and change are scattered here and there. Mountains wait to be moved. The world does not need prized achievements so much as an assertion of humanity, of being what we are made to be and reflecting in that the true image and glory of God, which is its own reward.”

Is this not what Paul is writing about as he encourages Timothy to keep the faith? Faith that has been handed on to him through his family as a living testament, not a dry written document of rules.... Timothy's experience of faith comes through the community that surrounds, accepts, teaches and loves him because Paul had enough faith to preach God in Christ Jesus; because Lois and Eunice had enough faith and so Timothy has come to believe. **Living faithfully** brings its own rewards when we see the seeds of faith taking root and growing in other people's lives.

Because his community had enough faith to live in God's way Timothy's faith was kindled. But by *inference* from the text something happened in Timothy / to him that meant Paul felt the need to address the issue of having enough faith to live in God's way with him, Timothy, because today we heard how Paul called on Timothy to **re-kindle** the spiritual gift of faith within him.

Jesus said, according to the Msg “You don't need more faith. There is no 'more' or 'less' in faith.” But what we need to accept is that we *do sometimes* need to **re-kindle** what we already have! The place for that is our faith community. When faith is lived and shared, beginning with the size of a mustard seed in the youngest of our community, we experience God with us, and then as it promises in Ephesians 3:20, we are able to do abundantly more than all we can ask or imagine even commanding a tree to uproot and fling itself into a lake!

As Paul says to Timothy: 13 So keep at your work, this faith and love rooted in Christ, exactly as I set it out for you. It's as sound as the day you first heard it from me. 14 Guard this precious thing placed in your custody by the Holy Spirit who works in us. (Msg) So live in Gods ways – by faith. Amen.