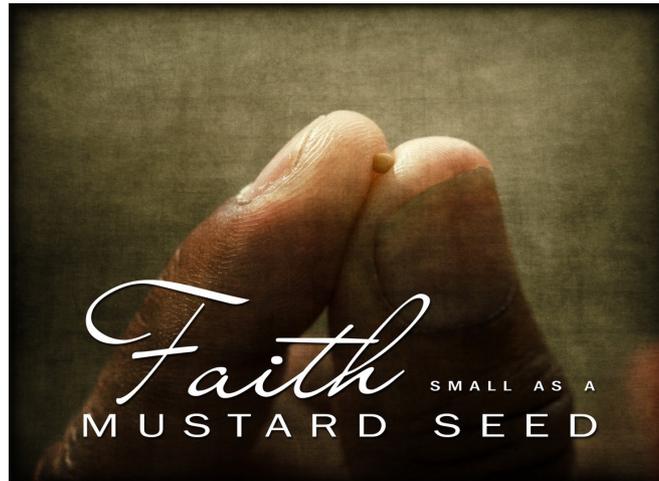


Ian Murray - 2nd October 2016



Lamentations 3: 22-26

Luke 17:5-10

Sermon

“If I just had more faith....”

I don't know about you, but there's barely a day goes by when I don't pray that I might have more faith.

In my last charge, when we were forced to close 6 churches and unite the congregations in one place of worship, I prayed that I might have more faith – faith to believe that this was the right decision and that we'd be stronger for it at the end of the day. It turned out that it was the right decision, and the parish was a whole lot stronger as a result.

And I pray for more faith, a deeper faith when doubts begin to show their head. Or I've got serious questions, or when I feel a bit distant from God. Please, just give me a bit more faith in you, in others around me, and in myself.

Give me more faith.

I've prayed to have more faith in these current times, when we're looking for new elders to help serve on the Kirk Session. I've prayed to have more faith and trust that there will be more people come to support and share in the life of the church; Faith that we will make progress and work together to the point where I can stand back and watch you move on into the future with a new settled ministry – the faith that there will be someone who will shepherd this flock and lead you forward. “Lord, give me that faith!” “Lord, let us all have that faith”, and I have that faith. I know it will happen – believe me, it will happen!

But I'm also aware that folk are always a bit reluctant to put themselves forward when it comes to leadership in the church.

I remember working on the Isle of Skye as a student. Every summer, the Board of National Mission (as it was called) sent students in training for the ministry to rural parts of Scotland to help out where there was a shortage of ministers. I went to Skye, Shetland and my home territory of rural Aberdeenshire.

There were a lot of very strongly committed Christians and on a Sunday the churches were well attended. A month or so into my time on Skye, it was communion. Now back home, in Aberdeenshire, when it was Communion, every man and his dog turned out to church. You wouldn't see them any other Sunday in the year, but give them a communion card, and they'd be there. On Skye it was the very opposite. The usual 70 or so became 20 on a Communion Sunday. Even the organist failed to turn up. The reason being, that they felt unworthy to receive the bread and wine. Although they were some of the most faithful and deeply committed Christian folk that I'd ever met, they personally felt that they lacked faith and worth. They were unworthy.

But the fact is, none of us is worthy and all of us at sometime or other lack faith when doubts appear on the horizon.

It's a reality which is as old as the apostles' own faith.

Jesus has just warned them not to become stumbling blocks to others and to forgive without counting. The number 7 means complete or perfect. Forgive completely.

And that's difficult. If someone wrongs you several times in the same day, and every time they repent and ask your forgiveness, you'd begin to wonder just how seriously their apology is. So this is difficult. This is a challenge. It's something which needs more faith than I presently have.

We need more faith.....

Surely the more we have, the better we'll be.

But that's not the way faith works.

Jesus is very clear that our faith is not about size or quantity. "If you had faith the size of a mustard seed," he said, "you could say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it would obey you."

Faith is not given to us in a packet or something which can be measured out according to how difficult the task or work before us. Faith isn't even about increasing our knowledge or what we know up here (head). It's entirely about what is in here. What's in the heart.

When I'm conducting a wedding, I'll refer to the couple's faithfulness to one another. That's not about what they believe or understand about marriage. They are faithful because they have committed themselves to each other in love and trust. They are faithful because they carry with them that one relationship

wherever they go, in all that they are and all that they do. So it is in our faith-relationship with Jesus.

The other thing about faith is that it doesn't change the circumstances of our lives. Instead, it changes us. Even the most faithful, those with the strongest faith and closest relationship with Jesus Christ are not shielded from pain and the difficulties of life. Instead, faith is the means by which we face and deal with the circumstances of life – the difficulties and losses, the joys and successes, the opportunities and possibilities.

Some days when the pain and heaviness of life seem more than we can carry it is by faith, our relationship with Jesus, that we get up each morning and face the reality of life. When we feel the pain of the world and respond with compassion by feeding the hungry, housing the homeless, speaking for justice; when we experience the brokenness of a relationship and offer forgiveness and mercy; when we see the downtrodden and offer our presence and prayers — in all those we have lived, seen, and acted by faith. And if there are days when we feel powerless, lost, and struggle to see the way forward. By faith we sit in silence and wait. I waited patiently for God, for God to hear my prayer. Faith is how we live; the lens through which we see ourselves, others, and the world; the measure by which we act and speak.

Jesus does not supersize our faith – because it's not necessary.

We live by faith not because we have *enough* faith but because we *have* faith, any faith, even mustard seed sized faith. That is all we need. Jesus believes that and so should we.

The question is not how much faith we have but, rather, how are we living the faith we have.

How is our faith, our relationship with Jesus, changing our lives, our relationships, the lives of others?

And if it's not changing our lives, our relationships, and the lives of others, then more of the same will make no difference whatsoever.

The mustard seed of faith is already planted within us. We already have enough.

It's not more faith we need – it's a greater response to the faith we already have – even if that faith is just the size of a mustard seed.

Amen.