



November 21, 2017

feeding...gathering...carrying...leading. (Isiah 40:11)

Dearest Church Family,

What a wonderful weekend of gathering we had here at the church! A huge thank you to Celia and Alysha and the worship team for the healing prayer training and evening of worship on Saturday. Our Father does love to gather us to Himself! We covered two main topics on Sunday – with an application to Stuart's injunction that our most powerful Christian response to this culture of contempt is silence – entrusting ourselves to God (1 Peter 2:23). Humility being critical for our ability to respond in silence, and faith as essential in entrusting ourselves to God. The goal of the message being to reexamine these critical, known aspects of our Christian life with the hope that as we look at what is good, lovely, and pure we will grow in reflecting it more in our own discipleship.

The context of our study this Sunday was from Luke 17, which discusses offense, and forgiving the offender seven times a day (v.1-4), a seemingly perfect breeding ground for a response of contempt. Where we started was the apostle's response after this teaching in v. 5 in which they asked the Lord to "increase" their "faith." Which seems not only like a legitimate request given the previous command of forgiveness, but the answer Jesus provides them is mind-boggling, kind of irritating, and seemingly unhelpful to their quest.

Jesus seems to indicate additional faith isn't required, as faith as little as a single mustard seed can apparently accomplish incredible tasks. Neither the size nor the quantity seems to be the issue (v.6). If this is the case, then we have to understand what Jesus says elsewhere about "little faith" and "great faith." In each instance, (4 times in Matthew 6:30, 8:26, 14:31, 16:8 and once in Luke 12:28 retelling a story in Matthew) Jesus seems to provide an additional reason for what happened, not just that they had little faith.

- Matthew 6:30/Luke 12:28 ("Do not worry, If God so clothes the grass of the fields...how much more will he cloth, oh you of little faith") = Jesus is addressing contributing factors like anxiety/worry.
- Matthew 8:26 (story of the disciples being caught in the storm, while Jesus is sleeping), Jesus says, "Why are you fearful, O you of little faith?" Pointing out fear as a contributing factor.
- Matthew 14:31 (Peter walking on water) "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" Pointing out doubt as an issue.
- Matthew 16:8 (disciples forgot their bread, and they are all stressed about it) "Oh you of little faith...do you not remember the five loaves of the five thousand and how many baskets you took up? Pointing out the issue of forgetfulness of what the Lord has done.

These are the only instances Jesus uses the phrase "little faith." Moreover, I just want to point out that Jesus NEVER uses the phrase "little faith" in the context of individuals approaching Him for healing. Additionally, in each occurrence Jesus does distinctly point out an additional strong element at play: anxiety, fear, doubt and lack of remembrance. On the positive side, the two instances in which Jesus uses the word "great" are with individuals who are not Jews, the first was the Roman Centurion and the Second the Canaanite women. They had no reason to have faith, especially given their status outside the Jewish community, and yet they seemed to have complete confidence that Jesus was capable and greatly revered His position and authority! Thus, it seems much less a matter of quantity of faith and more a case in which they demonstrated faith against the odds, since they would have no reason to believe that Jesus as a Jewish Rabbi would pay any attention to them, let alone grant their requests. The continued injunctions related

to faith beyond the gospels further support the idea that additional faith isn't needed, but rather faith can grow or be stirred (Romans 12: 3, 2 Corinthians 10:15, 2 Timothy 1:5-6). Which again fits with the image of the mustard seed used elsewhere of Jesus to describe how the kingdom of God is like a mustard seed which grows into a large tree and provides for the birds of the air. As our faith grows it seems our influence is greater, but our ability would be the same as it was when just a seed. Think of it this way. The difference is a tree is less susceptible to the elements that surround it, as our faith grows through experience with the Lord it becomes less and less susceptible to the fear, anxiety, doubt and forgetfulness that can seem to easily trip up a little seed.

Continuing Jesus states that this faith could command a mulberry tree to be tossed in the sea. This is a rather bizarre example, as it doesn't seem to relate either to ministry or to their request. My proposal is that Jesus is trying to focus them on the Source of their Faith, rather than the capability of their faith alone. Let me explain, this is a HUGE creational situation, instructing that one could speak to this creational object and it would obey. To me this screams of creation and our Creator God, God spoke and creation obeyed. It isn't a practical example that they would use, these are Creational examples of how we get to pointing to the one in whom we have faith. Might he be drawing these Jewish minds back to the Creator God - it is God who speaks and mountains move, as we put our faith towards God His power will work great things through us. The point isn't throwing trees into the sea – the point is God – a single-minded focus on Him.

Faith is the substance, because He is the Source! If faith becomes a means to an end - a means to our healing, a means to power, a means even to do good things for His kingdom then it ceases to be faith in Him, and becomes faith for faith's sake. Oh what grace, we can take whatever small, seemingly insignificant, portion of faith we have and put it ALL on Jesus and He will be pleased (Hebrews 11:6). He doesn't expect us to have more, get more, take more, measure up more. He just asks that all we have is focused wholeheartedly on Him.

Moving to the second half of Jesus response in Luke 17:7-10 we examined the story of the servants who respond to their labors with, "we are unprofitable servants. We have done what is our duty to do." I argued that at least one point of this story, which would have been potent both to the apostles and us as readers, is the experience being humbled, or at least pointing out bent towards entitlement. I purpose that Jesus is teaching it is not a lack of faith that is the problem; it is the lack of humility before our Master and Creator, which hinders our ability to walk in faith. Andrew Murray says that, "Pride makes faith impossible," and that "faith and humility are at their root one, and that we can never have more of true faith than we can have of true humility." Faith says you are God. Humility says I am not. They go hand in hand. It is also important to comprehend that humility does not have to do with worthlessness, the language of "unprofitable" and "duty" – are both debt words. They are saying there is no debt owed us. Humility does not say 'I am worthless'. It says 'You are worth everything. All that I am worth, I give to You.'

What an incredible God we have. He does not ask us to do anything He did not also have to figure out in this earthen vessel. *"Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."* (Philippians 2:4-8).

May our faith be stirred as we look to Him, and all He has experienced with us!
Happy Thanksgiving,
Monique