

Sermon for Pentecost XVII Year C 2025
The Seeds of Faith

How well I know the request of the apostles in today's gospel:
Increase our faith!

Who among us has not said out loud or to themselves,
“If only I had more faith . . .”
It seems to me that most of us have struggled with that at some point in
our lives . . . maybe even every day . . . every hour . . . every minute.
If I just had more faith . . .
I wouldn't have so many questions or doubts.
If just had more faith . . .
God would answer my prayers.
If I just had more faith . . .
he wouldn't have died,
she would have recovered.
If I just had more faith, I would be more involved in the church.
If I just had more faith . . .
I would be a better person, a better parent, a better spouse.
If I just had more faith . . .
I would know what to do,
I would handle things better.
If I just had more faith . . .
life would be different.

It is an approach to faith at least as old as the apostles' own faith
and it is the approach they have taken in today's gospel.
Increase our faith they beseech Jesus.

Just before today's gospel begins, Jesus has warned them not to become
stumbling blocks to others and he has enjoined them to forgive as often
as an offender repents even if it is seven times in one day.
I don't know about you, but that would be rather difficult.
Safe to say, it will be a challenge to live that way . . .
every day, every hour, every minute.

Of course we cry out, “increase our faith!”
in response to such a challenge.
It seems like a reasonable request.
If a little is good, a lot must be better.
After all . . . isn’t that why McDonald’s offers
to supersize our fries and drinks?
Surely Jesus would want to supersize our faith.

The request to increase our faith,
the belief that if I had more faith things would be different,
reveals, at best,
a misunderstanding of faith itself
and, at worst,
demonstrates our own unfaithfulness.

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

Not for anything, but boy would I like to see something like that
or anything like that from time to time.
Wouldn’t you? (But would that, in the end, increase our faith?)

But faith is not given to us in a packet
to be spent as currency in our dealings with God.
Faith is not measured out according
to how difficult the task or work before us.
Faith is not something we can bargain for from God.

Faith is a relationship of trust and love.
It means opening our hearts and minds to receive God’s grace
and then remaining open-hearted and open-minded towards others.
Being open-hearted and open-minded to the love of God for us in Christ
means we can be open-hearted and open-minded to others.
And that one-faith relationship with Christ

shapes who we are and how we live.
Faith is not about giving intellectual agreement
to every doctrine the church teaches.
Faith is not about how much
or how strongly we believe Jesus' words and actions.
After all, when we speak about a married couple's faithfulness,
we do not mean they believe or agree with each other's ideas
or even a particular understanding of marriage.
They are faithful because
they have committed themselves to each other in love and trust.
They are faithful because they continually give their life to the other
and receive the other's life as their own.
They are faithful because they carry with them that one relationship
wherever they go, in all that they are and all that they do.
It is the same in our faith-relationship with Jesus.

But here's the rub . . .
Faith will not change the circumstances of our lives.
Instead it changes us and how we respond
and live through the circumstances of our lives.
Living by faith does not shield us from pain
or any of the difficulties of life,
or erase the past,
or guarantee what will come our way in this life in the future.
Rather, faith is the means by which we face and live through the
circumstances of life here on earth, in the world in our time and place—
with all the difficulties, disappointments, and losses
and all the joys and successes and opportunities and possibilities.
Which, by the way, is all about the life of a seed, too.
Frankly, I am amazed at what any seed—
small, medium, large or supersized—can do.
Seeds contain the capacity for life and living,
for abundance and nurture.
But, of course, as all things are in this life,
seeds are fragile and yet resilient.

They often adapt and grow despite the conditions of their soil.
That's great, but as Jesus points out,
faith does not get us a pat on the back,
a reward or promotion in God's eyes.
It is simply the way in which we live and move and having our being
so that, at the end of the day, the faithful ones can say, without pride or
shame, *We have done only what we ought to have done!*
Or as the Victorians used to say,
“We are no better than we should be.”
Nothing more, nothing less.
We have lived in openness to, trust in, and love for Christ.
We have allowed him to guide our decisions,
our words, and our actions.
We have been sustained by him in both life and death.

Of course, faith, is not lived out in the abstract.
It is practiced day by day, hour by hour, moment by moment . . .
in the ordinary everyday circumstances
and in the extraordinary circumstances as well.
Some days when the pain and heaviness of life seem more than we can
carry, it is by faith—by love and trust in relationship with Jesus—
that we get up each morning and face
the reality of our life and the world.
Other days present other circumstances.

When we feel the pain of the world and respond with compassion by
feeding the hungry, housing the homeless, resisting injustice,
when we experience the brokenness of relationship
and offer forgiveness and mercy;
when we see the downtrodden and weary and weak
and offer our presence and prayers—
in all those we have lived and seen, and acted by faith.
Then there are days when we feel powerless, lost,
and do not know the way forward.
By faith, we sit first in silence and wait

and trust that God's kingdom, God's dream for us will come.
And then we offer ourselves as instruments,
builders of God's kingdom come.

Faith is how we live.

Faith is the lens through which we see ourselves, others and the world.
Faith gives us the boldness to act and speak for the common good.

Faithfulness means that no matter where we go,
no matter what circumstances we face,
we do it all in relationship with the One who created,
loves, sustains and redeems us,
the One who abolished death
and brought immortality to light through the gospel.

Jesus does not supersize our faith.

It is 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 do have?
How is our faith, our relationship with Jesus,
changing our lives, our relationships, and the life of the world?
If it is not, more of the same will surely make no difference.
The mustard seed of faith is already planted within us.

It is Christ himself.

He has withheld from us nothing, so we already have enough.

Did you hear that? We have Christ so we already have enough.

We do not need more faith.

We need more response to the faith, the Christ, the mustard seed,
the relationship we already have.

Do *faith* and faith will increase.