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## Heart and Soul ... A Weekly Meditation

February 1, 2015

Faith that Makes A Difference

*“The apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our faith!””*

Luke 17:5 (Common English Bible)

This is a plea that has become increasingly uncommon today, “Lord, increase our faith!” Though it is unfair to claim to know the heart and soul of people we pass on the street there seems to be indicators that faith - or the pursuit of it - has fallen in recent years. Some ninety-percent of Christian churches in the United States today have stagnated or are in decline. One magazine, *The Christian Century*, recently said that, on average, nine churches close their doors for good each day. There simply seems to be little passionate quest for faith in the living God.

Certainly these statistics are discouraging. Yet, careful attention to the words of our Lord seems to suggest that Jesus saw this current spiritual condition coming, *“But when the Human One comes, will he find faithfulness on earth?”* (Luke 18:8 CEB) Throughout the teaching and action of Jesus Christ this is the key word that defines and shapes his work; faith. In every encounter with women and men, whether they were sick or well, resistant or receptive, hostile or gracious, faith was the issue. When the ministry of the disciples produced fruit Jesus commended their faith. When it did not, Jesus asked, “Where is your faith?” (Luke 8:25 CEB)

It may be well that we pay closer attention to what Jesus actually asks. Jesus never asks that upon his return if he will find a flourishing church with attractive facilities and robust programming. The question is “faith.” Will Jesus find people whose hearts are moved with compassion and a deep longing to know God? Will Jesus encounter a movement of persons actively seeking to harness both energies and gifts for ministry to advance a new community of people defined by common concern and welfare? Jesus isn’t looking for massive church buildings. Jesus is looking for a massive engagement in what God is doing in the world.

Here, in Luke’s Gospel, the apostles do not ask for faith. What they ask is that Jesus increase their faith; increase their capacity for doing what it is that God has already placed on their hearts. The subject isn’t the absence of faith. The subject is “equipping” them for doing more with the faith already present. Perhaps the present sad state of churches today is not the lack of faith. Perhaps, just perhaps, it is that churches are failing to adequately equip people for their God-sized desire to be a part of something larger than their own small lives.

*Increase my understanding of your claim upon my life. Equip me for my unique place in your ongoing work in the world. In the name of the risen Lord, Jesus Christ, Amen.*

Doug Hood