

How Much Is Enough?

Luke 17: 5-10

How much is enough? Do you know? Do you stop eating when you've had enough? Do you stop buying new clothes, shoes, or electronic gadgets when what you have is sufficient? In the world today, especially in 21st century America, it can be hard to know how much is enough. Even harder than knowing when we have enough is the ability to actually stop taking, stop asking for more, and stop going after more. It may be next-to-impossible to actually stop wanting more.

Our habits of purchasing and consuming can be pointing to other issues in our lives. When we are continuing to take more when we already have enough, what emptiness might we be trying to fill? Is there some unresolved grief or unspecified fear? Is there some emptiness we're trying to fill with food, clothes, and stuff? Could there be some loneliness we're trying to ease with excessive busyness, alcohol, or even compulsive parenting?

Something similar was evidently going on with Jesus' disciples. They came to him with a request, "increase our faith." In other words, "give us more faith." Why did the disciples ask for more faith? Was it to be able to accept Jesus' teaching and its implications? Did they think they needed more faith in order to follow Jesus? Why did Jesus respond the way he did, not saying yes or no? He answered their request in a very curious way: "If you had faith the size of a mustard seed," about the size of a poppy seed, then you could do something amazing like tell this tree to "go jump in the lake," and it would do it.

What did he mean? What was Jesus saying with these words? What is the message for us? Jesus either was telling the disciples, "you don't have enough faith; you're inadequate in the faith department -- not even as much as a mustard seed (poppy seed). Because if you had even that much faith, you could do something amazing." Or maybe Jesus was telling them, "It only takes a little bit of faith to do amazing things. You already have all the faith you need, but you're not using it. You're not trusting it.

This story asks us as modern day disciples if we are inadequate in the faith department or just underachieving? The fact that, with all the tools at our disposal today, there is still so much poverty and injustice in the world. The values of the kingdom of God still take a backseat to the values of greed, exploitation, and apathy?

The first question we face from this story is that of whether we just don't have enough faith to implement Jesus' teachings either in our own lives or in the world. Do we somehow need to get more faith from somewhere outside ourselves? I can relate to feeling that I need more faith, more courage, or more ability to accomplish what needs to be accomplished and withstand what's ahead. My experience, however, is that when events confront and challenge, the resources I need, such as courage, ability, and faith don't appear from the outside. They emerge from within. When I pray and ask the Spirit for help or more faith, the prayer that has integrity for me is to ask for clarity of mind to remember what I already know, calmness of spirit to do what I have the ability to do, and peace in my heart to be present with my whole self. I pray to call on that faith the size of a poppy seed that is already my possession.

The second question, then, that we face is this: "do we already have an adequate amount of faith knowing that it only takes a little? With a poppy seed size of faith we

can do amazing things. We already have all the faith we need. We just not using it or perhaps not trusting it enough. I suspect it is true that if we were more fully using our faith and trusting the faith find within ourselves, we have that we could do amazing things. But how can we find it? How can we go about calling it forth from within ourselves? Well, at this point, there's some good news and some bad news.

The good news is that we do have within us and between us what we need. The non-biblical Gospel Thomas has these words, "If you bring forth what is within you, what you have will save you." To discover our faith within and to call it forth takes some discipline, the willingness to devote some time to stilling our minds and bodies. It takes some time spent in getting to know ourselves and discern our deepest gifts and the Spirit's calling for our lives. There really is no substitute for this discipline and this practice.

The bad news is that what tends to call forth the faith we have within us is the necessity for that faith and courage. That means finding ourselves in situations that make us uncomfortable or even afraid. This is the challenge we meet in the life and words of Jesus. This is what it means to follow Christ – to be willing to move ourselves at time into these situations or to be willing to stay in them. The words of this prayer seem to capture the attitude I have described:

Jesus
Our brother
You followed the necessary path
And were broken on our behalf
May we neither cling to our pain
Where it is futile
Nor refused to embrace the cost
When it is required of us;
That in losing ourselves for your sake
We may be brought to new life

(Janet Morley, *All Desires Known*)

All of this raises a third question, one that is in many ways the most challenging. Jesus' words to his disciples, and by extension to us, ask this: with a poppy seed of faith, will we do something amazing with our lives? The image Jesus used for something amazing was that of tossing a tree into a lake by the power of speech. What amazing things might following Jesus mean for us in today's world?

What amazing thing can you do with your life? Is there a dream around the edges? It takes faith to dream. It takes faith to own your dream and to take action and live that dream. It takes faith, but not that much, to do something amazing.

So, what amazing thing will we do as a congregation? We have set ourselves a goal to grow in size at least 10% this year – to fill this room and enlarge our ministry. We plan to translate that numerical growth to enlarge our budget by at least that same 10% for ministry and missions. We plan to grow people toward maturity of faith, but not of this is the dream I see for this congregation. Not of this is the faith-requiring dream. These plans of ours are only some action steps toward that dream.

The dream I see for Crossroads Church that requires some faith is for us to be a loud voice calling society and the church to change, to recognize how many of their choices are being based on fear, and how important it is to start making different choices.

I see us calling the nation to embrace the viability of peace by rejecting violence and trusting the power of our ingenuity and ideals rather than trusting our capacity to supply weapons and impose military solutions. We will be much stronger by leading the world to lay down weapons and find a path to a new world that is greater even than our vision because we will find it together.

The dream I see for Crossroads is to call the Christian Church to make some different choices – to move past the narrow truths that seem to be so right for so many. These include narrow views of the right to life, family values, and theological interpretations. We can call the church to move beyond the need to defend these narrow truths toward an inclusiveness of all faiths – to embrace the possibility of cooperation between religions and reject a belief in the inevitability of sectarian division and mutual exclusion.

The dream I see that requires a poppy seed amount of faith for Crossroads Church is that we will speak to the world around us on behalf of the faith we profess and that they will listen. *Justfaith* is a group of people here at Crossroads who have committed to meet together for about a year. We're a small group who work on forming community and who also study social justice needs and possible responses. We've been reading lots of books, watching some videos, doing some hands-on work, and sharing with each other about our individual life journeys.

We recently finished a book titled *How Much Is Enough* that chronicles stories of several families living in poverty in makeshift cities that tend to spring up within existing city structures around the world. These are stories about people living on so little that it would make you and me cringe. These stories challenge us to question "how much is enough" for us? What do we need? More important, are the excess goods, choices, and services somehow making our lives poorer?

It seems pretty clear to me that when my first, and often only, option in response to life's challenge is "I need more" then that strength, courage, and faith already residing within me never shows itself. It is never really needed and I am poorer for that. I find great truth in these words:

God sends each person
into this world
with a special message to deliver
with a special song to sing for others with a special act of love to bestow
No one else can speak my message
or sing my song
or offer my act of love
These are entrusted only to me.

(John Powell, *Through Seasons of the Heart*)

As our JustFaith group nears the end of our year's commitment, we have begun exploring how to use the great gift of community and reflection we've received and to embrace dreams that are emerging. At our most recent meeting, we enacted a dramatic simulation of a grassroots *micro-financing* cooperative in a small village in a third world country. A small group of women, who by almost all standards did not have enough, were finding a way to finance small businesses and beginning to make a pathway of possibility to their own future. They were doing this with a helping hand,

That exercise made a lasting impression on me in the form of three ideas and one more question. I'd like to share these with you in closing. The first idea is to underscore the power of a dream. In this case the dreams emerged through the tool of micro-financing. The power that drove everything, however, was the dreams of those women. The second idea is how much more powerful and important is a hand up rather than a hand out. The third idea is the reminder of the power of drama to bring to life needs and the possibilities of dreams. We at Crossroads are very much aware of the power of drama to touch people. That same medium can bring to life some of the possibilities we see and some of the dreams that are calling us. Through the power of drama, and even musical drama, we can bring to life the possibilities we see and inspire others and ourselves.

The question is this: what are you going to do with that poppy seed of faith you have within you? Do something amazing. No less is required to follow Christ today. No less is required for our collective voice to touch the world. No less is required to make dreams come true. It takes faith and we do have enough.

Luke 17: 5-10 The Message

5The apostles came up and said to the Master, "Give us more faith."

6But the Master said, "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.

7-10"Suppose one of you has a servant who comes in from plowing the field or tending the sheep. Would you take his coat, set the table, and say, 'Sit down and eat'? Wouldn't you be more likely to say, 'Prepare dinner; change your clothes and wait table for me until I've finished my coffee; then go to the kitchen and have your supper'? Does the servant get special thanks for doing what's expected of him? It's the same with you. When you've done everything expected of you, be matter-of-fact and say, 'The work is done. What we were told to do, we did.'"