

“TAPPING INTO GOD’S POWER”

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Text: Luke 17:5-10 NLT

God’s Word: Hebrews 11:1-3 NLT

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⁵ *The apostles said to the Lord, “Show us how to increase our faith.”*

⁶ *The Lord answered, “If you had faith even as small as a mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, ‘May you be uprooted and be planted in the sea,’ and it would obey you!*

⁷ *“When a servant comes in from plowing or taking care of sheep, does his master say, ‘Come in and eat with me’? ⁸ No, he says, ‘Prepare my meal, put on your apron, and serve me while I eat. Then you can eat later.’ ⁹ And does the master thank the servant for doing what he was told to do? Of course not. ¹⁰ In the same way, when you obey me you should say, ‘We are unworthy servants who have simply done our duty.’”*

“Increase our faith! If only I had more faith, Lord! Increase my faith!” How often have we cried these words? How often have we longed for a greater faith? How often have we wondered if God was really out there, and wondered why it was so hard to believe in him? Indeed, there are many times in our lives – seasons of challenge and suffering – when we may be tempted to roll our eyes heavenward and sigh aloud, “If only I had more faith!” But here’s the thing about faith; it’s not great faith we need, it’s faith in a great God!

Biblical scholar N.T. Wright offers a vivid imagery of faith. He says, “Faith is like a window through which you can see something. What matters is not whether the window is six inches or six feet high; what matters is the God that your faith is looking out on. If it’s the Creator God, the God active in Jesus and the Spirit, then the tiniest little peep-hole of a window will give you access to a power like you’ve never dreamed of.” Power enough even to “say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and it will obey you.”

It seems nearly impossible, doesn't it? But in God, all things are possible, and our faith originates with God and comes to us as a gift. We just need to take the faith we've already been given and deploy it more effectively. Many of us can remember that classic elementary school science project; the one involving electromagnets. You take an old iron nail, wrap a piece of wire around it, and attach both ends of the wire to the terminals of a dry-cell battery. In no time at all, that electrified nail is attracting all manner of paper clips, thumbtacks, and iron filings. In the presence of that electrical field, the nail is changed into a magnet. As long as it remains in contact with that field of electromagnetic power, it will attract other pieces of iron to itself.

But is the nail itself changed? Not one bit. It's the power flowing through it that makes the difference. And that's the way it is with faith. We all have it; but every so often, we doubt that we have it. We all get lost in thought, and ask ourselves, "Where's the faith? Do I still have it? Did I lose it? If so, can I find it again?"

But the thing about faith is that it's not even a possession of ours in the first place; that makes it kind of hard to lose faith. Because faith is a spiritual power that originates with God and comes to us as a gift. What we must do in our seasons of doubt is to hook ourselves up to God's battery terminals, so the surge of spiritual energy will flow into us, and then on through us to others.

How often do we marvel at the faith of others in the midst of adversity? Before going to seminary, I served in a town for a couple of years where I became close to the band director of the local high school. The drum major of the marching band was a bright young girl in her junior year. Amy didn't come from any sort of remarkable background. Her Dad was a mechanic and owned a local auto repair shop. And, as those of you who have ever been involved in school band programs know, it takes a special person to become drum major in her junior year. Amy was bright and dedicated, and she did a great job. Just about a year after I moved away, as Amy was about to graduate from high school, her father died quite suddenly; a massive heart attack one day in his shop. Needless to say, Amy and her mother and brothers were devastated. But just the other day, I saw this message on Amy's Facebook page; she said, "You know what, as I look around, I truly am blessed. I mean, really, I have a lot to be thankful for." This is the kind of faith we covet. A faith that can say, "I am blessed, I have so much to be thankful for," even after a father has been suddenly and tragically taken away from us.

And to that, Christ says, “You have that faith, all you have to do is tap into its power and you’re set.” So how exactly are we to connect to God’s faith power?

One clue is found in the later verses of the passage we heard this morning, in this parable about the master and his servant. After teaching that faith even as a mustard seed can do unimaginable things, Jesus goes on to affirm that no matter how much we do in faith, we cannot do more than is expected of us. This is part of being faithfully obedient to Christ; we are to act as his humble servant. You see, when we fail to humble ourselves before God in Christ Jesus, it prevents us from fully experiencing God’s love for us, and this is the power that fuels our faith! And so Christ urges us to serve our Master fully – like a slave who has worked all day in the fields and then comes in and prepares his master’s dinner before taking care of his own needs. All genuine service to God is done from gratitude, not to earn anything at all. And Christ’s message here is that when we have done all this, we should not feel as if we have done more than our duty.

This parable is the cure for self-pity. Mothers say, “My work is never done.” The father says, “I had hoped the children would be self-supporting by this time.” Even the greatest of saints has been known to wonder, “What’s the use?” You can see how easy it is for us to slip into periods of doubt, to give up and let our faith falter.

But think of the slave in Jesus’ parable. A slave does not expect the field to stay forever plowed. He cannot quit when a rainstorm washes away the seed; he has to reseed. He is not concerned with far results, but only with obedience. And God asks of us faithful obedience.

This doesn’t mean that God is a slave-driver. Christ is trying to urge upon us the necessity of our humble service in gratitude for God’s gracious gift of love. And when we tap into the power of that love and let it flow through us and out in humble acts of service, then our faith will grow. Think about the faith it would take to say to God, “My life is in shambles right now, Lord, but I’m going to keep serving you anyway.” Or even just to surrender completely to God; to say, “I am your servant Lord, ready to serve your will.” And then we have to recognize that when we have done our best, we have only done our duty. But because we have put our faith in God, even the impossible becomes possible. And faith is the greatest force in the world.

Listen to these words from Rick Warren. He says, “I used to think that life was hills and valleys - you go through a dark time, then you go to the mountaintop, back and forth. I

don't believe that anymore. Rather than life being hills and valleys, I believe that it's kind of like two rails on a railroad track, and at all times you have something good and something bad in your life. No matter how good things are in your life, there is always something bad that needs to be worked on. And no matter how bad things are in your life, there is always something good you can thank God for. You can focus on your purposes, or you can focus on your problems. If you focus on your problems, you're going into self-centeredness, 'which is my problem, my issues, my pain.' But one of the easiest ways to get rid of pain is to get your focus off yourself and onto God and others. You have to learn to deal with both the good and the bad of life. Actually, sometimes learning to deal with the good is harder. We need to ask ourselves: Am I going to let my life be controlled by possessions? Pressures? Guilt? Bitterness? Materialism? Doubt? Or am I going to be driven by God's purposes for my life?" When we let God and God's purposes be the driving force in our lives, then we are connecting our faith, however small, to God's power. Christian faith centers on Christ, believing that God's word in Christ can and will be fulfilled. So how is our faith increased? The quality is more important than the quantity: a tiny seed of faith is enough if the faith is real faith – faith in God revealed in Christ. With that, amazing things can happen!

On this World Communion Sunday, we are reminded of a very important way by which we can connect with God's power and increase our faith, and it comes in the power of this Table. When coming to the Lord's Table, we take into our hands a tiny morsel of bread, or drink from the cup of sacramental juice, it may seem like what we're holding in our hands is insignificant and inconsequential. It's ordinary stuff that bread and juice – no different in substance from what might sit on our dinner table at home. Yet, like the atom of hydrogen that's transformed by nuclear fusion into a blaze of power, that bread and cup have the ability to transform our lives in astonishing ways. There is nothing magical about the material stuff of the communion elements. It's all about the power we Christians call the Holy Spirit, that activates them in our lives.

Jesus said to his disciples that a mustard-sized morsel of faith is more than enough to uproot a mighty tree and cast it into the sea. There's no telling what a piece of communion bread or a sip of communion juice can do for people of faith who come to the Lord's table hungry and searching for what our host has prepared for us.

As you come to this table today, come as a humble servant. Come praising God for all the good and blessed things in your life, even if you are struggling in the midst of overwhelming trials. Come to this Table today with confidence that God's gift of faith is available to you, and real faith, however miniscule can overcome all things in God!