

Pentecost 17, October 6, 2019

(Lk 17:5-10; Hab 1:1-4. 2:1-4, Ps 37:1-9)

In the last 30 years I've been blessed with a number of very sweet dogs, rescued from shelters or found on the streets. But *smart* wasn't a word I could use to describe most of them. My first Humane Society adoption was Saki, back in Chico in 1992. Paul, who was thirteen at that time, made the observation that on good days Saki was *as smart as an onion*; on bad days she had the brains of a *doorknob*. I adored Saki, but Paul was pretty accurate.

Jesus uses a similar metaphor when he talks about having **the faith of a mustard seed**. I wonder: how much faith does a mustard seed have? And why on earth would I want to transplant a mulberry tree into the sea?

The gospel talks about *faith*: what is it? who has it? how do you get it? what difference does it make? The verses from Psalm 37 and Habakkuk talk about *waiting*. *Faith* and *waiting* go together, I think.

When you're waiting for something, you're waiting for the future. It struck me when I first read today's texts that the verb *will* is used seven times in the Psalm and eight times in Habakkuk.

The psalmist gives good advice: *don't fret*. There's evil in the world, and good things happen to bad people, but *don't fret*. Instead, **take delight in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart** (Ps 37:4). That's one of my favorite verses! And listen to the next verses: **Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him and he will do this: He will make your righteousness shine like the dawn, the justice of your cause like the noonday sun.**

If you love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all you soul and with all your strength and with all your mind (Lk 10:27), your way, and your *ways*, will be guided so that you live in “right relationship” with the Lord—that is, in *righteousness*.

Habakkuk cried out to the Lord because of all the evil and wickedness he saw around him. The Lord told him to *wait* for the outcome. **If it seems to tarry, wait for it; it will surely come, it will not delay. Look at the proud! Their spirit is not right in them, but those who are *righteous* live by their *faith*** (Hab 2:3b-4).

We look at the world around us and wonder why God permits such tragedies, such wickedness, and depravity. And God says, **Do not fret. Trust in me, and I will provide all you need. Live in righteousness, be present with me in prayer, seek the healing of the nations, the healing of your own land.**

Faith is our relationship with God, whom we know through Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Faith is God’s gift to us; what we do with our faith is *our* gift to *God*. Faith is a way of being; it’s a way of living in the presence of God. Faith isn’t knowing *about* God. It’s *knowing* God.

The disciples ask Jesus to increase their faith. Jesus responds, **If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and it will obey you.**

Obviously, the disciples *don’t* have faith even the size of a tiny mustard seed—we don’t see any mulberry trees in the sea. The disciples ask for *increased* faith, and Jesus points out that they haven’t really shown *any* faith.

The good news of the gospel, the incredible good news of our faith is, God seeks, calls, and pursues all of us unworthy, unforgiving creatures because he sees us through the veil of divine love—he sees us as faithful disciples who *delight* in following every godly command. (I think that must be some pair of rose-colored glasses our heavenly Father is wearing!)

Lord, increase our faith! Could you pray that prayer? Could you ask Jesus to give you more faith? It'd be easy to ask for deeper faith to maybe give healing for yourself or a loved one, or faith that takes the worry out of eternal life. But are you willing to risk a faith that'll make you more Christ-like in sacrificial giving? in sacrificial loving? in sacrificial *forgiving*? in sacrificial *living*?

This prayer was written by an unknown author: *O God, I don't pray for enough faith to move mulberry trees or mountains. I can get enough dynamite and bulldozers to do that. What I need and ask for is enough faith to move me.*

Ask, and it shall be given to you. Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart.

Thanks be to God!