

Luke 17:5-10
Increase our Faith!
October 3, 2010

Luke 17: 5-10 The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!" ⁶He replied, "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.

⁷"Suppose one of you had a servant plowing or looking after the sheep. Would he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, 'Come along now and sit down to eat'? ⁸Would he not rather say, 'Prepare my supper, get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink'? ⁹Would he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do? ¹⁰So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.' " (NIV)

A few weeks ago, President Obama awarded a Medal of Honor to Sergeant Salvatore Giunta for his heroism in battle in Afghanistan. Sergeant Giunta's bravery saved the lives of several of his fellow soldiers at great risk to his own life.

Throughout the battle he acted heroically. In the end, he stepped into the line of fire to stop two insurgents from carrying away one of his fellow soldiers who was wounded.

He killed one of the insurgents and wounded the other. He saved his wounded comrade and also prevented a number of other casualties that day.

I heard this hero being interviewed on the radio. He is 25 years old now. He was only 22 when he proved himself to be a hero. He denies being unusual. He claims that what he did was only average, that any other soldier would have done the same thing. He was only doing what he had trained to do, what his job required. At least that's what he says.

Most heroes claim that they just did what they had to do, or what anyone else would have done. These modest heroes want to duck the spotlight and turn away the praise and the thank you's. They cannot imagine that there are people who wouldn't have taken such risks or acted so boldly.

They are humble, these heroes. Faced with extraordinary circumstances, they react in extraordinary ways. Afterward they want to deny that anything unusual happened, that it was all in a day's work. They don't think that they are anyone special.

In today's reading from the Gospel according to Luke, the disciples first ask Jesus to increase their faith. He has just told them to be careful not to bring temptation to others and that they need to forgive others time after time after time. Their response is to ask him to increase their faith!

Just like us, they find it difficult to stay away from temptation and to forgive others when they sin against us. So they ask for more faith so that they can become able to do what Jesus is telling them to do.

Jesus' answer is not to give them more faith. What he tells them is that if they had any faith at all that big trees would pluck themselves out of the ground and go plant themselves in the sea!

But what does this mean? I know many people that I consider to have great faith, but I don't know anyone who could make a tree move! So it's hard to know what Jesus is telling us--- that with only a small amount of faith, faith the size of a mustard seed, we could do great things!

Jesus is not angry at them for not having enough faith. He is telling them what true faith is. He first gives them a startling visual image of a big mulberry tree, a tree that grows 50 or 60 feet tall and wide, coming up out of the ground, flying through the air, landing in the ocean and putting its roots down, planting itself in the water. Salt water no less.

And then he tells them a parable. A parable about a man whose slaves come in from the field. Does anyone tell their slaves to sit down and eat while he serves them first? Slaves are expected to continue serving their master, eating only after he is finished. It's their job!

It's what is expected of them. And no master says thank you to his slaves, because they are only doing what they should. Just like Sgt. Giuntas was only doing his duty as a soldier.

Jesus is telling us that this is what faith is, that we do what God has told us to do, what God has called us to do! Faith is not expecting God to serve us!

It is trusting that God has called us to do great things! And if we trust that's true, then we will do whatever we are called to do. We will do those things without expecting any thanks, just knowing that what we did is what we are supposed to do, as children of God, as followers of Christ!

We can do all the great things that God asks us to do. We can lead people to greater love of Christ. We can resist temptation. We can forgive others over and over. We could even move a tree if that's what God wants us to do!

We can do all those things if we trust in the power of God enough to allow ourselves to be a channel, a conduit, of God's power, grace, and love!

If we are holding ourselves back waiting for praise and gratitude, if we get the idea that we only do what God asks us to do in order to get thanked for it, for our own glory, then we are doing things for the wrong reasons.

We do what we do because of who we are.

Sgt. Giuntas did what he did on the field of battle because he is who he is---a brave, selfless soldier who cares more about the lives of his comrades than he does about his own life.

He didn't charge into enemy fire and save a fellow soldier because he wanted to get a medal. He did it because it was what being a soldier means. And so now that he is getting recognition for it, he doesn't know what to do with it.

He turns it away. He claims to be just another average soldier.

This is what Jesus is saying, that we need to do what is expected of us without thought of any reward or praise or thanks.

We need to be who God has created us to be, do what God has called us to do.

We cannot earn any kind of reward greater than the one we already have----and that's being beloved children of God! As beloved children of God, we can avoid temptation, forgive others, and live our lives serving and loving God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength!

So what does this mean in our daily lives? How do we live as normal, average, beloved children of God?

By serving others, by putting them ahead of ourselves. By seeing a need and filling it.

By forgiving those who trespass against us. By living lives that are grounded in the love of Christ.

By doing great things in the name of God----things we never could do on our own, but once we know whose children we are, we cannot imagine holding back!

By thinking of ourselves as average, as only doing what anyone else would do, because we are doing everything for the glory of God!

May we live our lives as beloved children of God, doing only what God asks us to do, in the name of Christ and by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Amen!