

Mustard Seed Faith – based on Luke 17:5-10

Aspen Community UMC

October 7, 2007

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When I was little I was given this little mustard seed, inside this little glass ball.

I don't remember who gave it to me, probably my parents or my grandmother.

I just remember playing with it and wearing it when I was little.

This is what I think of when I consider the mustard seed.

I knew it had to do with having a little bit of faith – or something like that.

I knew that it was important to have a little bit of faith.

I seemed to know that a little bit of faith can mean something very big.

Can it eventually move a mountain? I think I have pondered that from time to time.

I have carried this image with me through a lot of years -
and it reminds me even today – that faith grows. It can have wide-reaching implications.

Someone gave it to me, and I associated it with being at church.

I associated it with Jesus, and I associated it with
the many people who cared for me in those early years.

It occurred to me that when we baptize an infant in the church,
we need to be promising that child something like that.

We are promising a child that it will be important to us -
just like I was to the people at Central Methodist Church in Brownwood, Texas
when I was baptized as an infant –

And this mustard seed reminds me even today how important I was to those people.

Now, I did not necessarily think of that when I would open the box it was in from time to time –

I just never wanted to let it go. I have never wanted to throw it away.

Now I think I know why.

We are celebrating with Doug and Annette today the baptism of Devin Warren.

Doug and Annette were married here a few years ago
and have chosen to have their son baptized here
because it is a special place for them.

This gives us an opportunity to hold this child
in our church memory in a special way.

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Earlier this week I spent some time with Debby Oxley.

She and Jack were married here in this church thirteen years ago.

They don't live here but they visit each year
and attend here and have supported this church for all those years.

We were going through the building
and talking about the different areas of the building and different issues
that are a part of preserving and maintaining a 100 year old structure.
Debby had invited a long-time friend to join us as we looked at the building.

When walked up the stairs over here to the balcony
I pointed out the bell tower and how someone rings it just before our worship on Sundays.

And then Debby said to her friend,
“Do you remember when they rang the bell after the wedding?”
And there was a special moment of awe – of remembering – and joy
for that time and that place – which is right here.

Experiences like this are teaching me how important place and time are
for those special events in our lives.

This is not unique to this church.

What is important is that it happens and we get to share in it.
And more than that, we have the honor and the responsibility to hold the sacred moments.

For those sacred moments may flower into something wonderful as times goes on.

Marriages – baptisms – even becoming a member of a church -
placing one's faith in Christ and in this spiritual community right here.

Gandhi told us that faith is not something to grasp. It is a state to grow into.

An illustration of this might be the story about
how one day the great Michelangelo attracted a crowd of spectators as he worked.

One child in particular was fascinated by the sight of chips flying
and the sound of mallet on chisel.

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The master was shaping a large block of white marble.
Unable to contain her curiosity, the little girl inquired, “What are you making?”
He replied, “There is an angel in there and I must set it free.”
And then, as we grow into faith, we find that we want to serve.
The rather ludicrous example of the master and the servant in our scripture today
is hardly intelligible to us. But it does communicate with us that
serving is part of our relationship with the divine.

I’d like to suggest this is where we start with religion, or faith -
as if we are handed a large white marble block called religion.
We are then to then take the mallet in hand and set to work.
To be religious is not our goal but we start there, usually.
And we chip away at it hoping to find that angel,
that something which we can hold and call it real
and let it draw us into something more.
Faith is seeing a new reality and working to set it free.
We get busy with the chipping, and that is the service part of it.
And for the most part we don’t mind it at all – we mostly enjoy it.
It is really just love at work, or a work of love.

Ask any parent who gets up at 2:00 a.m. and then at 3:00 a.m. and then at 3:30 a.m.
to answer the cry of a sick baby. People who love never ask, “What’s the least I can do?”
Boys’ Town near Omaha has a poster of a little guy toting a tyke nearly as big as he is,
saying, “He’s not heavy; he’s my brother.”¹
Service related to faith often comes naturally,
Or it may come with practice. Sometimes it is learned.
Dwight L. Moody was a well-known evangelist.
He was hosting a Bible Conference in Massachusetts in the late 1800’s.

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Many of the participants came from Europe. There was a European custom of the time, of leaving ones shoes outside their hotel rooms to be cleaned by the hall servants overnight.

They did not know that there were no hall servants in America.

Walking down the dormitory halls that night, Moody notices the shoes.

He does not want to embarrass his guests.

He gathered up the shoes, went to his room and began to clean and polish them.

But a friend arrived unexpectedly and saw what Dr. Moody was doing.

The following morning the foreign visitors opened their doors and found their shoes shined.

They did not know by whom.

Moody told no one, but his friend told a few people,

and during the rest of the conference,

a different person volunteered to shine the shoes in secret each night.

This story has to do with what we are asked to do in today's gospel.²

So, what is the mustard seed all about?

It does not grow into a massive tree.

It does grow into a large and broad plant, or bush, and it can be a place for small birds to find shelter, or rest on its branches.

And its seeds produce the spices and condiments that flavor many things we eat.

Faith does have a broad and wide effect on our lives

and it enables us to grow in service and love for humankind

It encourages us to bloom.

And to think it all starts out from something small.

Maybe even a small step, like from one place to a slightly different place,

but enough to give us a whole new perspective.

I can look at the world from one view, or another.

And the place of faith is one with many branches, possibilities for all kinds of growth, for being able to move from one place in life to another to grow and change, and to share the blessings of love and laughter with others.

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And, most of all, to share the love of our creator
through the window of Christ.

It does not need to start out big to have big impact on our lives.

I was in a workshop yesterday about the environment and stewardship of the environment.

The purpose was to talk about it from a spiritual point of view,
and in spiritual communities, like right here.

Someone mentioned the writer Goethe,
whose work you will remember was celebrated here
in 1949 when Dr. Schweitzer was here.

Goethe cautioned us not to lead trivial lives.

And that is also what I think is a part of living with a little faith,
even as little faith as the lowly mustard seed.

for even with a small shift in perspective, we are able
to lead not trivial, but extraordinary lives -
and that is really what we want to do.

This shift in perspective empowers you and me
to take action when we step into the unknown in faith.

¹ Adapted from Alvin Rueter, *Freedom to Be Wrong*, CSS Publishing Co.

² Fr. Ernest Munachi Ezeogu