

Ya'll, I love Jesus.

However.

Sometimes what connects me to the Gospel stories and the message Jesus' is trying to convey, is not Jesus himself, but the disciples!

More of than not, I am so grateful that they are in the story, because I feel like Jesus is responding to something I could have said or done.

They are so relatable, they're my people.

If Jesus didn't have the disciples, he might've been able to give a bunch of sermons and try to teach about following God in a way that we might never understand.

But thankfully that's not the case.

He has to minister to a bunch of average folk who mess up, who are trying to do their best, who (it seems) sometimes speak before thinking, and this is what makes his responses understandable.

That happens in this passage.

Now, the first verse that we heard was this, "The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!" (Luke 17:5).

That sentence is an odd way to start a passage because it's in the middle of a larger story and it's important that we know why they demanded that he increase their faith.

In the verse right before this, Jesus asks them to do something really difficult- forgive often, forgive all the time.

In fact, he demands that they do it.

He says, “³*Be on your guard!*

If another disciple sins, you must rebuke the offender, and if there is repentance, you must forgive.

⁴*And if the same person sins against you seven times a day, and turns back to you seven times and says,*

“I repent”, you must forgive.’ (Luke 17: 1-4)

To this, the disciples plea to him, “Increase our faith!”

That response makes sense to me.

I think what they're really saying is, ooh man, you want us to forgive someone who sins against us 7 times?!

Jesus, we want to do what you say, but you are asking a lot of us, we're going to need you to increase our faith if you expect us to be faithful.

Jesus' response is less than kind.

He's probably having another one of those head-shaking moments, wondering why they just. don't. get. it.

And so in his response, he rebukes them.

He says, “If you even had faith the size of a mustard seed, you could tell a mulberry tree to uproot and be planted in the sea, and it would.

Now, a mustard seed is tiny, it’s comparable to a sesame seed.

Very small.

So, he denies their request and criticizes them before moving on to tell them another parable, hoping that maybe this time, they’ll get it.

You see, faith isn’t something tangible that we possess.

It’s not like you get shares of faith and watch them multiply in your faith portfolio.

Faith isn’t a physical gift that we can give each other, although I wish it was.

There have been plenty of times when people came into my office, struggling with their lack of faith.

I wish I could’ve just taken a little bottle of it off my bookshelf and given it to them.

But I cant.

And so that begs the question, how do we get more.

I think what Jesus is saying is to stop worrying about having faith, just do it, live into what you *think* it means to be faithful, and maybe, by the grace of God, your faith will increase.

Maybe it's possible to have a deep faith and then that compels you to do faithful or good things, but I think it's more likely that good works increase our faith.

For example, in the Bible, faith is reaching out to Jesus, even if it means lowering a paralyzed man down through the tiles of roof, because Jesus is surrounded by people (Luke 5: 17-26).

You know that some people in that group had major doubts about doing that, but I bet their faith increased after Jesus healed the man.

Faith is a Centurion asking Jesus to heal his servant, even though he knows he answers to Cesar and not to God.

No doubt he was probably skeptical and a little afraid of asking Jesus, knowing Jesus didn't think too kindly of the Roman militia, and yet, after the servant is healed, Jesus commends the centurion, saying that not even in Israel had he found anyone with such faith (Luke 7: 1-10)!

See, he acted and then experienced a depth of faith.

Faith is not letting fear get the best of you, and it's taking risks that challenge the status quo.

We see this in the story of the hemorrhaging woman who risked her life to touch the hem of Jesus' coat.

And when she realized that she couldn't remain hidden in the crowd, she came before him, trembling with fear, and falling down before him, she declared to him and everyone gathered there why she touched him.

And Jesus responded, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace." (Luke 8: 43-48)

No doubt she was terrified to do that, but I bet her faith was increased after she did it.

She must've had a little faith, at least the size of a mustard seed, to be willing to take that risk, and it paid off tenfold, and her faith probably increased mightily.

Sometimes the actions come first, and faith follows.

And they don't even have to be big actions.

Once in a while we are gifted with the opportunity to make a big impact or do something dramatic, but if we only look for those heroic moments, we miss all the little ones in between.

"Faith, as Jesus describes it, is just doing your job, just doing your duty, not because of any sense of reward but simply because it needs doing."

Faith, in other words, is doing what needs to be done right in front of you and this, Jesus says, the disciples can already do...

I think, by saying that if they had the faith even of a mustard seed, they could uproot and move a mulberry tree -- that it really doesn't take all that much faith to be, well, faithful.

And so Jesus tells his disciples -- both then and now -- that we've got all that we need to be faithful, and that being faithful, finally, is about recognizing all the God-given opportunities just to show up and do what needs to be done, like:

*doing our work [with honesty and integrity],
caring for those in need,
protecting the vulnerable,
reaching out to the lonely,
befriending the friendless,
keeping the world going and contributing to the common good.*

It's all the ordinary stuff we do all the time and, taken together and blessed by God, it's pretty darn extraordinary." (Lose, David. "Everyday Faith."
www.workingpreacher.org, 9.30.2013.)

And you will notice that all those words, which describe how to be faithful, they were verbs.

Because faith isn't something you pull off a shelf and possess, it's something you do.

It's working, caring, reaching out, befriending others, contributing to the good of the whole.

And faith isn't glamorous.

Once and a while it's the hero who saved the parent and child from a house fire or a sinking car, but we so rarely get accolades for being faithful.

Most of the time people won't even notice what you did, let alone want to interview you about it for the nightly news.

We are faithful because it's our duty, not because we want or seek any kind of rewards or accolades.

Faith is doing what needs to be done, right in front of you, and Jesus knows that we and the disciples can do this.

We have all the tools we need.

I think this might be part of why Jesus chastises the disciples for telling him to increase their faith, because they had all the faith they needed to make the right decisions.

Faith isn't an accomplishment or a mystical experience.

It often doesn't bring certainty or even superiority.

It's not a magic wand that waves away all the pain out of our lives, more like an aid that helps us get through the pain.

Faith is that tiny voice inside of us, sometimes the size of a mustard seed, that helps us make the right decisions day in and day out.

Another word for it might be our moral compass.

And we do these things, not because we have to, but because we should.

And that, my friends, brings us to the part of today's passage that you might have found troubling, the whole bit about the slave and the master.

I know that the concept of slave and master is ethically problematic for us today, but in Jesus' time, slaves were a socioeconomic class.

The same Greek word that's translated into slave in this passage, is translated into the word servant in other places in the Gospel of Luke.

It just means someone who is wholly devoted to another.

Again, I know it's a metaphor that might make us squirm, but Jesus' point is that slaves didn't do things for accolades or rewards but simply because that's what they were supposed to do.

And this is what our faith should compel us to do, to be wholly devoted to God and show that devotion in every decision we make from the smallest to the biggest.

So, maybe the bad news is that Jesus can't hand us more faith in a neatly-wrapped package.

The good news is that we have all the faith we need.

So don't wait to start following Jesus until you have more faith or feel more committed.

Because that confidence, that faith comes from actions.

And I know you have faith at least the size of a tiny mustard seed, because you are here.

So start making faithful decisions, even if they are tiny ones, and see how that influences your commitment to following Jesus.