

“The Motion of the Ocean” -- Luke 17:5-10

I think that our Gospel lesson today is a little confusing. Don't you?

This seems to say that if I trust Jesus enough can I perform miracles. Beat cancer. Find a job. Cure addiction. I could uproot a tree and have it jump into the Crystal River with my mind, if I want, right? You hear stories of miraculous “faith healings” now and then, right?

Then you hear stories like these:

- Ava Worthington. Born in 2007, she was a robust, healthy 10-pound baby. When she was three months old, a cystic growth appeared on her neck that restricted her breathing and weakened her whole immune system. She began to lose weight. In response, her father called together - not the best doctors - but members of the church who anointed her with oil, gave her drops of wine with water, fasted, and prayed over her. Despite all these efforts, on March 2, 2008, Ava stopped breathing and [died of pneumonia](#) with no efforts to save her—no rescue breaths, no CPR, and no 911 call. One doctor claimed that Ava could have been saved at almost any point.
- Zachery Swezey was a 17 year-old when he got appendicitis. Unpleasant, - painful -- but millions of people go through it without incident. Unfortunately for Zachery, instead of going to the hospital, his parents stood over him and they prayed for him to get better. Meanwhile, actual help was a 911 call away. Zachery died while his parents watched. His death was totally preventable and lacked even the mercy of painkillers.

If these folks had just had more faith, would their children still be alive? I don't know...is there a greater faith than to put your own child's life on the line for it? -- How could you have more faith than that?

I have to confess to you.., sometimes I feel ashamed... even angry... that my faith isn't what it should be. Don't you? Could my faith be even smaller than a mustard seed? How small is that? My faith, my trust in the Lord isn't enough to cure your cancer – your addiction? I firmly believe that God cured me of my alcoholism and my substance addiction 10 years ago. I'm convinced. I believe in miracles because I am one. But I

haven't healed anyone else...I haven't cured anyone – have you? Do you ever wonder, “What's wrong with me?”

Well - There's nothing wrong with you – not a thing.

One thing we know for sure about Jesus is that he doesn't make promises that can't be trusted. Could it be that we are missing the point of the story then? Let's look at where the disciples just were, and what they were just doing.

Just prior to this passage the disciples have just been told they have to forgive not once, not twice, but specifically, “... *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 17:4). That's the very last verse before this passage. This passage is a continuing saga... We need a narrator who says, “Previously in Luke 17...”

Forgive the same person over and over? 2,000 years later we still can't quite get our heads around that one! No wonder the disciples are – not requesting – but demanding – the Greek grammar here is imperative so it's not really a request. It's “Do this, not would you, could you, please, or anything like that. They are commanding Jesus to increase their faith! I can hear them now: “Increase our faith, then, Jesus!”

The word “faith” or *pistis*, in the NT Greek, -- so often seems to be understood as some kind of agreement that we have successfully convinced ourselves to go along with something silly or at least something unbelievable. Faith is not a head thing. It's a heart thing.

An article in Psychology Today even says, “The longest distance in the world is from head to the heart. Taking what we know and turning it into a demonstrable action, something that will elicit change in our lives and the lives of those around us, is true wisdom. The ability to transform knowledge into action...”

When Jesus talks about faith he's not talking about what you do with your brain. He's taking about what you do with your hands and feet, with your lips and your wallet and your privilege, your power, and your time. Faith in Jesus is not shown by saying or thinking things about him, but by actually following him and becoming like him.

Increase our faith, the disciples say, -- and so do we, don't we? Increase our faith!... and Jesus doesn't offer any support or encouragement – no advice -- He kind of gives them a brush-off - no tips about prayer; Not even a little pat on the butt -- “You're doing great! Keep it up!”

Now, I may be new at this whole pastoring business, but if someone came into my office asking for help to increase or deepen their faith, I think I would get pretty excited! Out would come all the books by great theological thinkers, Niebuhr, Wesley, Bonhoeffer – Let me sign you up to be liturgist or better yet, a youth chaperone! -- oh, and how's your prayer life?

But Jesus doesn't do that – he never does what WE would do or what we expect Him to do....NO!

No. In fact, Jesus sounds a little impatient and sarcastic to me... I always wish I could be a fly on the wall when Jesus responds to these guys; I would love to see his face or hear the tone of his voice: "Dudes – Your faith could be the size of a mustard seed and you could get that bush to go jump in the lake!"

What?!? Getting a bush to jump in a lake? Now that's just silly. Why would He say that? Jesus is a lot of things, but 'silly' isn't one of them. What in the world is Jesus talking about?

Maybe he's a little ticked that we even think faith comes in sizes in the first place. Increase our trust! Make us more loyal! It's like being more or less pregnant! You are or you aren't. You have faith or you don't.

If I can steal a bit of secular wisdom, the first part of this passage teaches us, "it's not the size of the boat that counts," –the second part teaches us, "it's the motion in the ocean." What that means here is, it's not how much faith you have; it's what you do with it. That's what the two parts of this story teach us. You don't need more faith, and you just do what's expected of you.

Which brings us to the second part of this thing --The part about the servant not getting to sit down with the master and enjoy his dinner? Let's say I just came in from plowing the field, and now I have to cook dinner and serve the boss? Do I not get a reward? This sounds so familiar all of a sudden – Should I get a special reward for just doing what's expected of me? Can any of us go into work tomorrow and say, "I'm going to get something out of this today" Like your boss is going to be especially gratified that you did your job? Of course not. So where's the good news? Where's my reward? ...You're already getting it! It's the unearned love of God for humanity - for you... It's grace.

We don't have to work like slaves - -that's not what Jesus is teaching us here. We do the things we do in our closest relationships – think partner, think best friend ever – We do what we do in and for those relationships without any thought of reward or praise,

don't we? Well, if we love God as much as – or more – than we love our spouse or BFF, that's how our relationship with God can be. How it should be. If we just do it.

It's not the size of your faith, it's the motion in the ocean. Don't get all caught up in how far it is from here (*head*) ... to here (*heart*). Just do it.

Maybe the disciples, being human, simply doubted themselves. That would be a pretty human thing wouldn't it? Sometimes we don't believe in our faith. We forget that we have it.

There's a story out of the Gospel of Mark, Chapter 9; about was a father of a boy who suffered convulsions all his life, and when the disciples tried to heal him they were unsuccessful. Jesus came and asked the father, "How long has this been happening to him?" And the dad said, "From childhood. Sometimes he even falls into the fire; this thing is going to kill him! If you are able to do anything, please -- help us." And Jesus – once again, a bit snarky, said to him, "If you are able! —All things can be done for the one who believes."

The worried father responded with one of my all-time favorite lines from scripture – in fact, in my ten years clean and sober I have prayed this prayer so often I can't tell you... The father cries out, "I believe; help my unbelief!"

Amen.