

**Little Faith, Big Disciples**

Luke 17: 5-7

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World Communion Sunday

First Federated Church

Peoria, Illinois

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(SERMON NOTES)

Frankenstein doesn't scare me.

Flying monkeys do.

I remember as a child being terrified each Easter as my family would sit down to watch *The Wizard of Oz*. The story is based on the adventures of a little Kansas girl named Dorothy who had been knocked unconscious during a tornado. In her unconscious state Dorothy tries to find her way back home. Along the way she meets a Cowardly Lion in search of *Courage*, a Tin Man in search of a *Heart*, and a Scarecrow in search of *Courage*. Each believes that a mysterious figure known as the *Wizard of Oz*, or *The Great Oz*, who resides in the Emerald City, holds the key to their quest.

Their journey takes them over many perilous trails and through many adventures. Finally they reach the Emerald City and discover, in the words of the music group *America*,

*Oz never did give anything to the Tin Man*

*That he didn't, didn't already have.*

The same was true of the Lion and the Scarecrow. The amazing thing about this discovery is that the Wizard merely pointed out to them that they already *possessed the thing that they wanted!*

I got to thinking about this as I reflected upon our gospel lesson. The gospel writer in Luke has carefully crafted his account of who Jesus is. We need to consider the context. Jesus had just finished telling four parables—*The Lost Sheep*, *The Lost Coin*, *The Lost Child* (aka *The Prodigal Son*) and *The Rich Man and Lazarus*.

Then we have today's lesson. When I was a kid sitting in Sunday School or a young man listening to a sermon on this text I always got the feeling that somehow *I* was to blame if I didn't have enough faith. After all, didn't the parable say that if I had faith the size of a mustard seed that I could uproot trees? I even gave children's messages along that same line! In some ways such an approach makes us think that "Faith" is a commodity that can be purchased through hard work, or that it is a secret locked in some kind of heavenly vault. If only we could learn *the combination* or have tried just a little bit harder, then any of us could somehow find that illusive faith.

But it occurred to me, that is not what Jesus was saying at all. I like how Eugene Peterson in his *The Message; The Bible in Contemporary Language* translates our lesson. As the disciples mentally digest the four parables Jesus gave to them, he saw, I think, their perplexity. So he said, *Hard trials and temptations are bound to come*, He said, *(and) too bad for whoever brings them on! (It would be) for a millstone to be hung around your neck and to be thrown into the sea then to make someone else stumble. ...*

*Be alert. If your friend is going wrong, correct him. If he responds, forgive him. Even if it's personal against you and repeated seven times (in one) day, and seven times he says, "I'm sorry, I won't do it again," forgive him.*

It is at this point that the disciples say to Jesus, *Give us more faith!* This is too hard.

But Jesus replied to their request saying,

*You don't need more faith. There is no "more" or "less" in (terms of) faith. If you have a bare kernel of faith, say the size of a poppy seed, you could say to this sycamore tree, "Go jump in the lake," and it would do it.*

For the longest time I *never* understood that this was a metaphorical statement. Call me “stupid” or “dumb,” but I always took it literally. And I knew that no matter how hard I tried, without the aid of a shovel or a backhoe there was no way that I would ever be able to uproot a tree and toss it into a lake!

The apostle Paul, in his letter to the Ephesians, helped me understand what Jesus was really saying.

(Bibles p. 178) *For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God—not because of works, lest any (one) should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.*

Listen carefully to what Jesus really said. ***Faith IS a gift from God. God has already planted the seed of Faith in our hearts!*** In other words, like the Lion seeking Courage, the Tin Man seeking a heart and the Scarecrow seeking a brain, we already have all of the faith that we need to do the work that God calls us to do. **The problem is we just don't believe it. Therefore, we settle on playing Life small.**

One night, when I was a boy, my father gave me a little poem that he had kept in his wallet for years. It was written by a little known poet named C.W. Longenecker.

*If you think you are beaten, you are.  
If you think you dare not, you don't  
If you like to win but think you can't,  
It's almost a cinch you won't.  
If you think you'll lose, you're lost.  
For out in the world we find  
Success begins with a fellow's will,  
It's all in the state of mind.  
If you think you are outclassed, you are.  
You've got to think high to rise.  
You've got to be sure of yourself before  
You can ever win the prize.  
Life's battles don't always go  
To the stronger or faster man.  
But sooner or later, the man who wins  
Is the man who thinks he can.*

If you drive outside of the city of Peoria you will see in the fields around us that this is the time of harvest. Combines and grain trucks abound. Blowing soy bean and corn dust sometimes makes drift across the highways like a fog. An allergy may kick up.

Months ago all of the farmers who are now harvesting planted little seeds into the ground. They fertilized and cultivated, prayed and watched, waiting for this time of year. And they are hoping for a big harvest. I think that so far, it looks good.

God planted little seeds of faith into each one of our hearts. Those seeds have been nurtured and cultivated by the people and circumstances of our lives. And, if we have been diligent, we assisted in the cultivation process through the spiritual disciplines of worship, prayer, study, fellowship and mission.

God, too, is looking for a big harvest. From little seeds God looks for big disciples. Disciples big enough not to settle for what is but for what could be. Disciples big enough to dream big Kingdom dreams and then find a way to make those dreams become a reality; disciples big enough to step off of the security of the dock, and into the boat; disciples big enough to step out of the boat and onto the water.

TGBTG

