

“You already have it” A sermon by Lee Ireland
Cathedral City Community Presbyterian Church
October 6, 2019 Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost
Luke 17:5-10

Prayer: Open our eyes to see your Spirit in our life. Open our hearts to receive the blessings you send each day. Guide us with your wisdom so that through us Christ may walk on the earth once again. Amen.

I love to ride roller coasters. What a thrill traveling at high speeds, feeling weightless in a death-defying drop, wondering if you'll make it back to the start without falling out of the coaster car. What about you?

I developed my taste for roller coaster riding when Linda and I lived in Ohio. We rode just about every coaster in the state, but our favorite place to ride coasters was Cedar Point in Sandusky, Ohio. They have the best wooden roller coasters.

Since leaving Ohio we have found there's a competition among amusement parks to build a bigger, faster, badder, coaster. Every year another new coaster is built that claims title of the best.

Biggest, best, fastest. Aren't those words we hear a lot as people describe what they want out of life. If something is good, it can always be better or we can have more of it or we can improve on it – bigger houses, faster cars, and on and on. Perhaps that need to always have more of something prompted the disciples to ask Jesus to increase their faith.

What about Jesus' reply: **“If you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and it would obey you.”** Is Jesus shaming the disciples for their lack of faith? Are Jesus' words saying to you and me you'll never have enough faith? Do you think the disciples hung their head and stared at the ground as Jesus scolded them for their lack of faith? That's probably how many of us read these words. We often feel inadequate, like our faith is not ever enough. Perhaps we read our feelings into these verses. We would like to have more faith – faith that could uproot a mulberry tree.

I believe that Jesus' answer was delivered with kindness in his voice and a twinkle in his eye, a bit of a smile on his face. Can't you just see Jesus pinching his thumb and forefinger together saying, with just this much faith you can do things you think impossible.

Isn't Jesus really telling the disciples they have all the faith they need – even though that faith is only the size of a mustard seed?

If you thought of Jesus' words as being delivered in this way, would you feel better about your faith – even though it's the size of a mustard seed? I think so! Reading the text in this way is consistent with the loving Jesus we see in the Bible.

Eugene Peterson's translation of the Bible, called the Message, makes this love and kindness in Jesus' reply quite clear. Here's the translation for those same verses: **But the Master said, "You don't need more faith. There is no 'more' or 'less' in 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."**

Jesus' words to the disciples and to you and me are really encouraging. Forget about getting more, better --- and accept what faith you have and use it to serve God.

If the words of Jesus are really encouraging words to the disciples, then what's this about the slave and master in the next few verses? It's difficult for us to avoid reading our culture into Jesus' comments about slavery. Slavery in Jesus' day was not like the slavery the African American endured and the slavery some people still endure today. In Jesus' day, many slaves and masters respected each other. Often people became slaves or servants, a better word, for economic reasons. Servants were not only laborers. In many cases, servants were well-educated individuals responsible for educating the master's children.

Jesus uses this example of servant/master because it was known to the people he's talking to. He relates the mutual respect between master and servant to our relationship with God. There's an accountability and an expectation in the master/servant relationship. The master expects the servant to perform his or her duties and the servant expects to receive food and shelter.

What does master/servant have to do with our faith? Your faith, living your faith, can be understood as a servant/master relationship. You and I serve God out of a sense of duty and delight, living as Jesus lived. We serve God not to get bonus points, but because we know that Jesus has shown us the way to live. And we want to live that way. We serve and receive God's blessings in return.

We have all the faith we need to serve God. That's good news! So, use the faith you have -- whatever the amount! No need to fall into the trap of wanting more. Jesus is telling us we already have all the faith we need. Claim it and boldly use it to love and serve others as Jesus did when he walked the earth.