

Increase Our Faith

Gathering

Create a space for worship - perhaps with a small table with a bible, cross and candle.

*This week, it would be appropriate to find a **green cloth** or scarf to signify that we are worshiping in "ordinary time". Take some deep breaths as you gather your thoughts towards God.*

Light Candle

We light the candle - focussing our attention, allowing ourselves to be drawn to its flame. We look to Jesus, the light of the world, a light that shines even in the darkest of times offering hope and healing.



Acknowledgement of Country - Sacred Footsteps

As we gather in this place,
we give thanks
for the Wodi Wodi People of the Tharawal nation.

We acknowledge the commitment
their ancestors made
across the generations
to nurturing this Land.

Together,
may we walk into the future,
recognising the sacred footsteps
that continue to lead us
to the promise of Heaven.

Call To Worship

Come and bow before the One who gives the seed and scatters it.
The One who is the provider of sunshine and rain.
Come and bow before the One who calls us by name,
and who gives us enough -
that we might serve him and the world.
Let us worship our God who gives life.

Sing - Gather Us In (TIS 474)

Here in this place new light is streaming,
now is the darkness vanished away,
see, in this space, our fears and our
dreamings,
brought here to you in the light of this day.
Gather us in, the lost and forsaken;
gather us in, the blind and the lame;
call to us now, and we shall awaken,
we shall arise at the sound of our name.

We are the young, our lives are a mystery;
we are the old, who yearn for your face;
we have been sung throughout all of
history,
called to be light to the whole human race.
Gather us in, the rich and the haughty,
gather us in, the proud and the strong;
give us a heart so meek and so lowly,
give us the courage to enter the song.

Here we will take of wine and the water,
here we will take the bread of new birth,
here you shall call your sons and your
daughters,
call us anew to be salt of the earth.
Give us to drink the wine of compassion,
give us to eat the bread that is you;
nourish us well and teach us to fashion
lives that are holy and hearts that are true.

Not in the dark of buildings confining,
not in some heaven light years away,
but here in this space, the new light is
shining,
now is the kingdom, now is the day.
Gather us in, and hold us forever;
gather us in, and make us your own;
gather us in, all peoples together,
fire of love in our flesh and our bone.

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Prayer Of Adoration And Confession

Lord, your majesty is observed throughout all of creation:
not as overlord and slave-master, but as the lifeblood and life-force of all that
exists.

You are in everything,
and everything that is of nature, and that is good, exists because of you.

From the smallest mustard seed to the largest tree— from the greatest
of human-made constructions, or scientific advancements, or
engineering breakthroughs, to the most fundamental parts of creation
— the simple atom— you make all things possible.

Oh, would we have faith so strong as to be able to trust you with
everything. This is what we crave.

Yet it is hard, Lord. It is hard to have faith and to trust in the potential
we have been given— to be your workers in the world— who can
influence positively the creation we live in.

It is hard, Lord.

It is hard to keep believing that despite our floundering, failings, and lack
of faith in ourselves, that you maintain faith in us.

It is hard, Lord.

It is hard to believe that you could have chosen us for such an
important task when we have this innate tendency to compare
ourselves to others.

Merciful God, no matter how hard it might be for us, today show us enough of your
grace, that we might know ourselves forgiven for our doubts and that we might grow
through our questioning. We ask that you carefully and sensitivity, steer us towards a
deepening faith, that we might trust and believe and more confidently disciple in your
name. Amen.

Sing - Yours Be The Glory (TIS 380)

Yours be the glory, risen, conquering Son,
endless is the victory over death you've won;
angels in bright raiment rolled the stone away,
kept the folded grave-clothes, where your body lay.

*Yours be the glory,
risen, conquering Son,
endless is the victory
over death you've won.*

See, Jesus meets us, risen from the tomb;
lovingly he greets us, scatters fear and gloom;
let the church with gladness hymn of triumph sing,
for the Lord is living, death has lost its sting.

Yours be the glory...,

No more we doubt you, glorious Prince of life;
life is naught without you: aid us in our strife;
make us more than conquerors through your deathless love;
bring us safe through Jordan to your home above.

Yours be the glory...,

Words: Edmond Louis Budry

Listening for God's Voice

Reading: Luke 17:5-10

⁵ The apostles said to the Lord, 'Increase our faith!' ⁶The Lord replied, 'If you had 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.

⁷ 'Who among you would say to your slave who has just come in from ploughing or tending sheep in the field, "Come here at once and take your place at the table"? ⁸Would you not rather say to him, "Prepare supper for me, put on your apron and serve me while I eat and drink; later you may eat and drink"? ⁹Do you thank the slave for doing what was commanded? ¹⁰So you also, when you have done all that you were ordered to do, say, "We are worthless slaves; we have done only what we ought to have done!" '

For the Word of God in Scripture,
for the Word of God among us,
for the Word of God within us,

Thanks be to God!

Reflection

For years I think I have been looking at this saying by Jesus in the wrong way. In the past, I am not sure how helpful I have found this saying. Not because it's so bad, or so hard, but because it made me and others think of faith as a quantity, as something you can have more or less of. I remember robust conversations happening around what could happen if a person had more faith. Or a person wasn't being healed because they didn't have enough faith. If only you had more faith, you could move this mountain, because Sometimes there are mountains to be moved.

In today's passage the disciples beg Jesus, "Lord, increase our faith!" but he says to them: "If you had 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." As a child we had this huge mulberry tree in our back yard. I loved that tree. It had great big knobby bits you could use to get a foot hold and I would climb up into the foliage and look down on my siblings. I was baffled then about why you would want to put the tree into the sea? As I read this passage this time around, and heard what others had to say about it, it sounded as if Jesus were saying, "Increase your faith? You don't need more faith. You only need the tiniest little speck. No, it's not about having more faith, it's about putting your faith in the right place, or more specifically, in the right person."

In the Greek language, there is a 'future conditional clause': if you were to have the faith of a mustard seed – implying that you don't have enough faith. But there is also an 'according to present reality conditional clause' in Greek: which would change Jesus's words to the disciples to: 'if you have the faith of a mustard seed (and you do) – implying that they already have enough faith.

In a book called *The Heart of Christianity*, New Testament scholar, Marcus Borg, devotes an entire chapter to faith.ⁱ (I am grateful to Jim Sommerville for this summary). Marcus Borg claims that in Western Christianity faith has come to mean holding a certain set of "beliefs," or "believing" a set of statements to be true. For most people, being a Christian means believing that there is a God, believing that the Bible is the revelation of God, believing that Jesus is the Son of God, and that he died for our sins, that Jesus rose again, and believing that the Holy Spirit is present with us today. Borg (who grew up Lutheran in North Dakota) acknowledges that "for some Christians the list would be longer: believing that the Bible is the inerrant Word of God; believing in Genesis rather than evolution; believing that Jesus was born of a virgin, that he walked on water, that he raised the dead (as in Lazarus), that he himself was raised from the dead in a physical bodily form, and that he will come again someday.

Sometimes the beliefs become very specific, Borg writes: believing in infant baptism instead of adult baptism (or vice versa); believing in "the Rapture"; believing (or not believing) in purgatory. The list goes on and on, but as you have probably experienced for yourself believing "the right things" is very important to Christians.

You can see how easy it is then to turn faith into a matter of the head rather than the heart. And Marcus Borg would insist that it has happened rather quickly. Back in the Middle Ages the word orthodoxy meant "right worship"; that is the literal meaning of the word. But during the Protestant Reformation it came to mean "right belief," partly because all those Baptists, and Methodists, and Presbyterians were still figuring out what they believed. Should we baptize infants or adults? Is communion a sacrament or an ordinance?

During the time known as the Enlightenment, there were changes to the way we understood truth. In the Middle Ages no one questioned the story of Jonah and the Whale. It was in the Bible: so of course it was true! But during the Enlightenment people began to ask: Could there really be a fish big enough to swallow a man? And could a man really live after three days in its belly? The only truth that counted was that which could be verified scientifically; in other words, truth was replaced with fact.

And so, after being run through the wringer of the Reformation and the Enlightenment, faith has come to mean believing the right things, and believing them no

matter what, even if they are not scientifically verifiable. But it was not always so.

Marcus Borg helps us by looking back to the Middle Ages, and four different Latin words for faith.

1. The first word is *assensus*, from which we get the English word assent, and it means pretty much what you would expect it to mean: giving one's mental assent to a claim or proposition, that is, believing that it is true. The opposite of this kind of faith is "doubt" in its milder form and "disbelief" in its stronger form. For example: you might go from doubting that a fish could swallow a man to disbelieving it altogether. Marcus Borg says that when he was a teenager he had those kinds of doubts and prayed, "Lord, I believe. Help my unbelief!"

Since then he has wondered, "Is this really what God wants from us: our mental assent to a long list of theological propositions? Our heads rather than our hearts?" He also notes that you can believe all the right things and still be in bondage, still be miserable, still be unchanged—that faith as *assensus* doesn't have much transformative power. And yet there are some things we can and should affirm.

At the bare minimum being Christian means a) affirming the reality of God, b) the utter centrality of Jesus, c) the presence of the Holy Spirit, and d) the centrality of the Bible.

2. The second Latin word for faith is *fiducia*, and the closest English equivalent is fiduciary, which may mean something to the bankers and lawyers out there, but doesn't mean much to many of us. A better word would be trust, or "radical trust." *Fiducia* is like floating in an ocean of God's grace.ⁱⁱ

Have you ever tried to teach someone to swim? First you teach them to float. They need to relax and float, trusting in the buoyancy of the water. Borg says that *Fiducia* is learning to trust the buoyancy of God, and the opposite of this kind of faith is not doubt but anxiety, or worry. In the middle of that storm on the Sea of Galilee, when they were afraid their boat was going to sink, Jesus asked his disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Where is your faith?"

A few chapters later he says, "If God so clothes the grass of the field, will he not clothe you, you of little faith?" In both cases he is talking about faith as *fiducia*: radical trust.

3. The third Latin word is *fidelitas*, which can be translated as fidelity, or faithfulness, specifically, faithfulness in our relationship to God. It means what faithfulness does in a marriage—being faithful to God in the same way you might be faithful to a spouse. The opposite of this kind of faith is not doubt or disbelief, but unfaithfulness or adultery.

Another biblical word for this kind of unfaithfulness is idolatry—giving one's ultimate loyalty and allegiance to something other than God. Borg says, "As the opposite of idolatry, [this kind of] faith means being loyal to God and not to the many would-be gods that present themselves to us. Christian faith means loyalty to Jesus as Lord, and not to the seductive would-be lords of our lives, whether the nation, or affluence, or achievement, or family, or desire."ⁱⁱⁱ

4. The fourth Latin word for faith is *visio*, and this one is fascinating. As you might guess, *visio* is a way of seeing "the whole," a way of seeing "what is." And there are three ways of seeing it.

a. One is to see reality as essentially hostile, as if everyone and everything really were out to get you. It may not surprise you to learn that there have been some forms of popular Christianity through the centuries that have viewed reality this way, as if God himself were out to get us, and that—unless we offered the right sacrifices, or said the right prayers, or did the right things—he would.

b. In the second way of looking at reality it is essentially indifferent. Someone with this view might say, “The universe is made up of swirling force fields of matter and energy, but is neither hostile to nor supportive of our lives and dreams.”^{iv} And if God is the one who brought it all into being, he has long since stopped intervening or even caring. If you look at reality this way, you might not be as defensive as in that other view, but you might become rather selfish, looking out only for yourself and those you love, since obviously no one else is.

c. In the third way of looking at reality it is essentially nourishing and life-giving. It has brought us and everything else into existence. It is filled with wonder and beauty. It loves us and cares about us. This is the reality Jesus was talking about when he said, “Look at the birds of the air, the flowers of the field.” God feeds them. God clothes them. God sends the rain on the just and the unjust.

Can you see what a difference faith as visio could make in your life? What a difference there would be in seeing reality as essentially hostile, essentially indifferent, or essentially nourishing and life-giving? This last way of looking at reality can lead to the radical trust we talked about earlier. As Borg says, “It leads to the kind of life we see in Jesus and the saints, known and unknown. Or, to use words from Paul, it leads to a life marked by freedom, joy, peace, and love.”^v

There they are: four Latin words for faith - *assensus*, *fiducia*, *fidelitas*, and *visio* - and you may have noticed that all but the first are relational words. *Fiducia* describes a relationship of radical trust. *Fidelitas* describes a relationship of love and loyalty. *Visio* describes a relationship of life-giving nurture. *Assensus* is the only one that means giving our intellectual assent to a set of theological propositions and that’s important. But it may not be the most important thing.

“If you have faith the size of a mustard seed,” Jesus said, “you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you.” And so we try to increase our faith. We try to believe more and doubt less.

We try to believe things that are, frankly, unbelievable. And we do it because there are mountains that need to be moved. But what if that’s not what Jesus meant? What if he meant, “You don’t need more faith. You only need the tiniest little speck. No, it’s not about having more faith, it’s about putting your faith in the right place, or more specifically, in the right person.”

Because here is the truth: that little “mustard seed” is found only five times in the Gospels. It’s mentioned twice in reference to faith, as in, “If you had faith the size of a mustard seed.” But the other three times Jesus uses it he talks about how, if it’s planted in the ground, this tiny seed can become a huge bush, even a tree, in which the birds of the air can build their nests. A mustard seed, in other words, is something small that can grow big—if you put it in the ground. But if you put it in a plastic bag, and bury it in the bottom of your sock drawer? That mustard seed will always stay the same size.

What if Jesus is trying to tell us this: that we don't need a lot of faith, we only need the tiniest little speck. But we need to put our faith in the right place—not in ourselves and our ability to believe—but in God, the One who gives us life and nurtures it, the One who loves us like a faithful spouse, the One we can trust completely, and yes, the One who can and does move mountains. Let us put our mustard seed of faith in him, and watch it grow.

I remember trying to teach our daughter to float. She couldn't stay still and then the water would wash over her face and she would panic and thrash about. If I took my hands away from under her she would immediately try to stand up. Then one day she got it! There she was stretched out in the water letting the water hold her at the surface. My hands were still under her but no longer touching her back. She was floating on her own. I remember the wonder of it as she gently floated with her eyes closed rocking back and forth. I must admit I had my doubts that that day would ever come and I imagine God saying: "O, ye of little faith. Why did you doubt?"

- (i) Marcus J. Borg, *The Heart of Christianity: Rediscovering a Life of Faith* (HarperSanFrancisco, 2003).
- (ii) Borg attributes this metaphor to Soren Kierkegaard.
- (iii) *Ibid.*, p. 33.
- (iv) *Ibid.*, p. 35.
- (v) *Ibid.*, p. 36

Responding

Sing - Have Faith In God (TIS 619)

O Lord, you lead me
by the still waters,
quietly restoring my soul.
You speak words of wisdom,
the promise of glory,
the pow'r of the presence of God.

O Lord, you guide me
through all the darkness,
turning my night into day.
You'll never leave me,
never forsake me,
the pow'r of the presence of God.
Have faith in God...

*Have faith in God,
let your hope rest on the faith he has
placed in your heart.
Never give up,
never let go of the faith he has placed in
your heart.*

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Prayer for Others (Helen Laidlaw)

Our loving God who is always there for us and supports us in all our circumstances. It is hard to pray as the voice of this whole congregation as we have so many varied needs and wants and passions and hurts. As Janice has spoken about FAITH, we recognise that we do not always trust and believe. But you already know all our needs so help each of us to be open to you and share our thoughts and feelings in prayer and meditation.

Firstly I want to pray for our minister Kath as she recovers from very painful dental work. May she find great blessing in the Presbytery Retreat she is to attend this week. There are

many other members who are coping with illness, pain and general aging and help each of them to rest in you.

I want to thank you for our wonderful warm and pleasant weather after so much rain, even if the weeds are equally delighted with the sunshine.

But the technology we have available in our homes brings so much doom and gloom as we are aware of all countries' needs and tragedies. We pray for Ukraine and their endless war. We pray for Somalia and so many other African countries where hunger is rife. We pray for Pakistan and the havoc of the floods. We also pray for the many migrants trying to flee Libya to Europe. The COP conference is important for us as we support the Pacific Nations as they begin to disappear as the seas rise. Help the members reach conclusions that make a difference and not just vague words.

I want to particularly pray for our own First Nation people who are attempting to find a Voice in our racist society. I am fortunate to have good friends who are of the Wadi Wadi nation so know their stories and the pain which has been felt. When we acknowledge the Elders it is helpful to know their abilities and wisdom.

Also thank you for all the members of our congregation who contribute in so many ways. Help each of us find the skills and willingness to contribute to others. And remind us to always say thank you!

In Jesus name, and with continuing amazement at what enrichment His words and example have brought to our lives, we are blessed.

AMEN

Holy Communion

If you would like to share in Communion and are unable to join with us in-person, please let Rev Kath or Rhonda Back know. We would love to bring Communion to you in your home at a time that suits you.

Offering

We make space now to think about what we have heard and seen today and consider our response.

As we make our offering - we remember again that this is not just about money - either here in the plate or through a bank transfer - this is also about how we are generous with our time and energy and gifts; and about how we resolve to live differently because we have encountered the living Christ.

We pray...

Lord, take what we have to offer: our money, our time, our talents, and no matter how small we might feel these gifts to be, may they become part of the overall goodness of humanity's offering.

And may this vast pool of human resources be channelled by your Spirit's guidance, and so change our world for good.

Amen.

Sending

Sing - Christ be Our Light

Longing for light, we wait in darkness.
Longing for truth, we turn to you.
Make us your own, your holy people,
light for the world to see.

*Christ, be our light! Shine in our hearts.
Shine through the darkness.
Christ, be our light!
Shine in your church gathered today.*

Longing for peace, our world is troubled.
Longing for hope, many despair.
Your word alone has power to save us.
Make us your living voice.
Christ, be our light!...

Longing for food, many are hungry.
Longing for water, many still thirst.
Make us your bread, broken for others,
shared until all are fed.
Christ, be our light!...

Longing for shelter, many are homeless.
Longing for warmth, many are cold.
Make us your building, sheltering others
walls made of living stone.
Christ, be our light!...

Many the gifts, many the people,
many the hearts that yearn to belong.
Let us be servants to one another,
making your kingdom come.
Christ, be our light!...

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Sending and Blessing

Go forth in faith, use it, grow it, develop it.
Share it, give it, distribute it,
move mountains and build highways to heaven.
And the blessing of God our Creator, Redeemer and Life giving Spirit,
enable you to grow and flourish now and forevermore. Amen

Rev Janice Freeston
13 November 2022