

The apostles say to Jesus, “Increase our faith.”

In this story we’ve been working our way through the last few weeks,
Jesus started by talking to the tax collectors and sinners
until the more respectable folks - the Pharisees and scribes -
got offended that Jesus was spending so much time
with a bunch of sinners.

So Jesus turned his attention to the Pharisees
and through a series of parables about sin and repentance
told them that instead of worrying about somebody else
they had better get honest about their OWN hypocrisy
and their OWN sinfulness.

After hearing all that, the disciples say to Jesus, “Increase OUR faith!”
Maybe they’re finally realizing that being one of Jesus’ followers
doesn’t make them better than other people.

So Jesus says to them, “If you had faith the size of a mustard seed,
you could say to this tree, ‘Go plant yourself in the sea,’ and it would.”

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Let me ask a question:

how does Jesus sound to you when he says that this morning?

Imagine you are one of his disciples.

What does he sound like when says that to you?

Does he sound harsh, and sarcastic,

like he’s telling you how much you disappoint him,
how you’re never quite good enough?

Or does he sound...gentle?

Is Jesus pleading with you to see what is possible?

I'm going to re-read those 2 verses. Notice how Jesus sounds to you.

The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!"
The 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.

[PAUSE]

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For most of my life those words have sounded like Jesus was scolding me,
like he was one of my basketball coaches in school
who was always trying to toughen me up.

I wonder this morning, if maybe I'm not the only one here
who has heard enough of that scolding tone of voice in your life,
who has heard enough "If only" speeches to last a lifetime,
especially the ones you say to yourself at 3 in the morning.

So what if Jesus isn't scolding his disciples this morning?

What if Jesus isn't scolding you, either?

What if we've misheard Jesus' tone of voice all this time?

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See, I think Jesus is actually saying something beautiful to his disciples,
and something beautiful to you, too.

I think he's saying, "All you need...is a LITTLE faith. Just a little."

"You don't have to have the power to move mountains.

That's God's job. Come to me...with a seed of faith.

Come to me with whatever you have. A whisper of alleluia."

“I know you. I know you carry inside you the brokenness of a sinner,
the complicity of a tax collector, the hypocrisy of a Pharisee.”

“But I also see inside you the hopefulness of a child,
and the faithfulness of a disciple.

It’s all there inside you. Bring it to me.”

“Bring that tiny seed of faith, the one you think isn’t big enough to matter.
Bring it to me, and watch what God can do.”

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Last week I mentioned the Going Deeper class Fr. Rhett is teaching.
They’re reading a book called “Resurrection” by Rowan Williams.
That book is so important to me.

Outside of the Bible, the Prayer Book, and these 2 hymnals,
I don’t think there’s another book that has deepened my faith
as much as that one.

I can’t even begin to summarize it,
but I want to tell you what he says about 2 very familiar Easter stories,
stories about what Jesus can do with a seed of faith.

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The first story is when Mary Magdalene goes to the tomb on Easter morning
and discovers Jesus’ body is missing.

She thought it’d been stolen and she runs to Simon Peter
to tell him what had happened.

Rowan Williams says that seeing the empty tomb
almost destroyed Mary’s hope in God.

See, first she saw the Son of God, who was also the friend,
who had healed her of her demons, murdered on the cross.

Then, as if that weren't enough,
she thought they had stolen his body to desecrate it.

Mary's despair was as low as it could possibly be,
and yet somehow she found the strength
to go back to the tomb one more time.

Not really knowing why she was doing it,
with only the tiniest seed of hope remaining in her,
Mary Magdalene went back to the empty tomb one more time.

When she got there she saw a stranger
and thought maybe he was the one who had stolen Jesus' body.
But when the stranger called her by name - Mary! -
she saw that he was actually the risen Jesus.

Williams says that even though Mary's hope was all but dead,
the tiny seed of hope that brought her back to the tomb
was enough for Jesus to heal her, to restore her,
to give her back her life by calling out her name.
Mary's hope did not die because Jesus is alive.

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The second Easter story is when Jesus came to the disciples on the shore.

At this point the disciples have retreated to their old lives,
retreated to their boats. They are no longer fishers of men.

They know Jesus is risen

but still they've gone back to their old way of life
because they've been exposed as failures, as cowards.

They ran away from the cross...and no one faster than Simon Peter.

Simon was supposed to be the rock on whom Jesus would build his church,
but he denied Jesus three times.

So even after Jesus appeared to them,
the disciples, and especially Simon, decided to go fishing.
They wanted to act as if their old life with Jesus had never been.

For the disciples, it's not enough that Jesus is alive.

They still have to face their sin, have to face their failure.

So three times, once for each betrayal,
Jesus asks Simon Peter, "Do you love me?"

Simon is a broken man at this point,

unfit to lead the disciples, unfit to be the foundation of the Church.

All that he has left is a seed of faith.

"Yes, Lord. You know that I love you."

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Rowan Williams says Simon Peter will never again

be innocent of his betrayal. Instead, he will be forgiven.

"Simon has to recognize himself as a betrayer:

that is now a part of his past that makes him who he is.

If he is to be called Peter again, that failure has to be assimilated."

“Simon has to learn that his betrayal of Jesus

does not make Jesus a betrayer of him.

His calling as Peter, the rock, is still there,

is still waiting to be lived out.

His calling is still alive because Jesus is alive.”

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Friends, the losses I’ve suffered in my life

are certainly not as traumatic as Mary Magdalene’s,

and my denials of Jesus are not as dramatic as Peter’s,

but they have still left their mark on me,

just like your losses and your failures have left their mark on you.

Mary’s journey and Peter’s journey are our journeys.

Before we can be the messengers of God’s grace that Jesus calls us to be,

before we can proclaim the good news of Christ crucified and risen

with courage and conviction,

before we can be Christ’s hands and feet,

binding the wounds of the hurting

and speaking salvation to the suffering,

we have to let go of the lie that we are better

than the people we disagree with.

We have to come to Jesus with the only thing we truly have -

a tiny seed of faith.

Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden,

and I will give you rest.

Amen.