

## *Sunday Sermon October 5, 2025*

In today's Gospel the Apostles ask, in a way that sounds more like a demand, for Jesus to "increase our faith." And Jesus says, "If you had only a little faith, faith the size of a mustard seed, you could do amazing things." So in light of this exchange, it is appropriate for us to ask: what is faith?

The Book of Hebrews defines it in one beautiful line, "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." (Hebrews 11:1) Faith is believing in something we cannot see, something beyond our physical, material world. Dr. King once said: "Faith is stepping out on the staircase when you can't actually see the stairs."

I believe there is a life beyond this one, a beautiful life filled with light and love where we are reunited with those who have gone before us. To believe in eternal life requires faith. It is believing in something that I cannot see with these eyes or prove scientifically, but it's something I believe to be true with every fiber of my being, something that I see with the eyes of my heart through the gift of faith...

Faith is also believing in the limitless power of God and that that power works through us. Ephesians 3: 20 and 21 says: "Glory to God whose power working in us can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine. Glory to God from generation to generation in the church and in Christ Jesus forever and ever." It's a statement of faith that God's power works through us as it has worked for generations to accomplish God's purposes in the world.

Our former Presiding Bishop, Michael Curry, used to use a wonderful analogy when he talked about faith in God. He'd talk about his faith in Delta airlines. Now as you might know, when Bp. Curry told a story, it was lengthy and full of details, so I'll give you a summary:

First, he'd give a really detailed description of takeoff: how the plane taxis onto the runway, the engines start to roar and plane rolls, faster and faster. Flaps down, it's getting louder and louder and picking up more speed. "And the you start taking off" Bishop Curry said "and you can feel Sir Isaac Newton biting the dust."

Up and up you go, bouncing sometimes. And then you might break through the clouds and you can see the sun shining and it's wonderful. Soon you're at 35,000 feet. And then, as it relates to faith in God, Bishop Curry said:

“It occurred to me. I don’t know who’s flying this plane. I don’t know the pilot. In fact, I don’t even think I saw the pilot. I don’t know the mechanics who were supposed to work on it to make sure it’s up to snuff. I never met ‘em, don’t know ‘em from Adam. I don’t know the executives at Delta to make sure they’re in compliance with all FAA regulations. I haven’t checked anything: who’s flying the plane, who fixed the plane. I don’t know if they know how to fly. I don’t know any of that. And yet I have entrusted my life to Delta Airlines.”

And then he concludes: “Brothers and sisters, if we can entrust our lives to Delta, or whoever else you fly, we can entrust our lives and the destiny of this world to the Lord God Almighty who loves and cherishes each of us, precious children.”

A good story. A story about faith as trust and believing in what we cannot see.

Jesus also tells a somewhat strange and perplexing story on the heels of his teaching about mustard seed faith. He tells of a servant who comes in from working all day and is told to prepare supper. After a long day at work with the boss presumably just sitting around, the servant does his duty and serves.

What’s this all about? It might be suggesting that faith isn’t just believing in something we cannot see. It’s not giving intellectual assent to propositions or ideas that defy reason or common sense, and it’s more than simply trusting in God and knowing God is always there.

Faith is action. Faith is more than what we think, or what we feel. Faith is what we do. It’s duty and service. That’s why we call it “the practice of faith.” It’s active. It takes faith to believe that small acts of kindness, and standing up for the truth, and resisting forces that demean and discriminate will make any difference at all.

Mother Teresa served the poor in Calcutta, India for nearly 70 years. It started when she found a beggar dying on the street and took him in to her convent so he could die in peace and dignity in the presence of people who cared. Her ministry grew into an order of nuns whose mission it was to serve the poorest of the poor, the vulnerable and dying, one suffering soul at a time. She once said, “I am a little pencil in the hand of a writing God who is sending a love letter to the world.”

Mother Teresa was highly acclaimed and awarded for her good works. One would hope that God would reward her with a deep satisfaction and contentment, that she

would have constantly felt the warm embrace of God's love for all her good works and her selfless deeds. That she would have had a rich, full prayer life and know that God was with her every step of the way, but it turns out Mother Teresa experienced the absence of God in deep and profound ways.

In letters released after her death, she wrote of questioning the very existence of God. Not surprising really when one is constantly encountering human suffering, to question the existence of a merciful, loving God. The point is Mother Teresa's faith did not always give her good feelings, or consolation, or answers to difficult questions like the reality of human suffering, but faith kept her pulling the dying out of the gutters.

Faith is duty and service. That's the lesson Jesus is teaching with the story of the servant. Faith is action, reaching out with love and mercy, with compassion and goodness, with faithfulness and generosity. Practice those virtues long enough and you will grow in faith.

Some people think that having faith means never having doubt, but Mother Teresa's witness shows us that living out the faith sometimes causes tremendous doubts. It doesn't make sense that some people starve while others have more than enough, but she just kept feeding.

She kept living out and practicing her faith. She kept loving her neighbor, especially those in greatest need. Faith is believing that God's power can work through us. Faith is action. Faith is service. Faith is practicing and living out God's command to love our neighbor each and every day.

As Jay Cormier puts it (and I'll conclude with this): "The real power of faith ... is the resolve and dedication to use whatever resources and abilities we possess to affect change and accomplish good. Faith is the unshakable conviction that every ordinary act of selfless kindness and generosity can transform poverty, violence and injustice into the Kingdom of God; that the smallest act of forgiveness can lift up and heal; that the simplest act of compassion, done in faith and trust in God's providence, can transform our world in the justice, love and peace of God."

May it be so... Amen