

Reflection for Worldwide Communion Sunday October 5, 2025

by Jennifer Irving

I want to start by saying just how much I can relate to the disciples' plea to Jesus that is found in our gospel reading this morning: "Increase our faith!" My relationship with my faith is at best rocky and always has been. When I was attending Emmanuel College (alongside the new moderator of the United Church of Canada I might add), I went to a party at my friend Kaarin's shared student house on Euclid Street. Her older brother was there and he joked to a friend – "Jen's gonna be the only atheist minister out there." Well, he was a little misinformed. Not only because there are quite a few atheist ministers out there—most famous in our church being Greta Vosper. But also because it's not that I don't believe in God...I'm not an atheist. I just want to say that out loud in case you were starting to worry! It's just that I have all these questions—and I always have. And over the years it has made me feel like I probably don't have enough faith. If I had a stronger faith, a better faith, I wouldn't have all these questions, would I? Not only that, if I had a bigger, better faith—I'd be happy with a mustard seed size faith—then wouldn't I be able to move a mulberry bush into the sea or better yet, heal the sick? I can't help but long for that. And if Jesus could just "increase our faith" then maybe, just maybe we could actually make the world a better place.

As you know, we started a weekly lectionary bible study at the beginning of September. (This week we will be meeting on Wednesday afternoon at 1:30pm in the Round Room –and just so you know, this is the kind of bible study where you don't have to come every week to join in—we simply take the scripture readings for the coming Sunday and dive in to discussion – you are more than welcome to just drop-in whenever it works for your schedule—I've heard from participants that it makes these reflections of mine a lot more interesting!)

But, I'm just mentioning it, because that very first week that we started our bible study, Greta Horton, who couldn't attend, recommended a book to me called "Better Ways to Read the Bible" by Zach Lambert. I immediately ordered it on audible and have been listening to it in the car ever since—finally finishing it on my trip to Meaford on Friday for a lunch with fellow United Church ministers. Zach Lambert is the lead pastor at a church he started in Austin Texas called "Restore". He starts his book describing how he got kicked out of his church youth group and a Christian School for asking too many questions—I was like, "this book is for me"!

Here's one of the things that stuck with me about what Zach has to say about this mustard seed faith:

What is faith? This is a vital question because Christians usually equate faith with a set of doctrines we believe. Rather than a focus on following Jesus, we often reduce Christianity to doctrines, dogmas and belief statements. When people ask if you are a Christian, often what they are asking is "Do you believe all the things I've deemed necessary for Christians to believe? and, "Do you believe them in the same way I do?"

(Which, as an aside, is sometimes when I feel like I don't want to say I am a Christian because I know that is what they mean when they ask me.) Zack goes on to say:

Being a Christian is not primarily about checking all the right doctrinal boxes or defending the correct dogmas. Being a Christian is about following the way of Jesus. Faith is... more than belief. It is a posture. A way of moving and living in the world. A shallow understanding of faith also comes with the unintended

consequence of setting faith and doubt in opposition to each other. If faith is absolute certainty about our beliefs, then any doubts or questions become an attack on faith. But the opposite of faith isn't doubt. In fact, I believe that the opposite of faith is certainty—if I'm absolutely sure about everything I believe, then placing my faith in God and choosing to trust Jesus becomes unnecessary. Faith isn't unquestioning belief in a set of doctrines, faith is trusting God and God's love with everything—our questions, our doubts, our anger, our changing beliefs, our deconstruction, our reconstruction, our broken selves, our broken situations and. our big broken world. Putting on the Jesus lens means being open about our doubts, wrestling with our uncertainties and working out our faith alongside Jesus and our communities. It also means we can find comfort in knowing that we will never have everything figured out and that questions and doubts are an inevitable part of a living and growing faith.

"Better Ways to Read the Bible" by Zack Lambert

Mic drop.

When you come to bible study at Centennial, it is a place where we are safe to ask our questions and share our doubts and that doesn't mean we are a people of little faith, but we are a people with a living and growing faith.

And, Jesus doesn't say that they will know we are Christians because of what we believe anyway—Jesus says, they will know we are Christians by our love. *John 13:35*

At first, I didn't like how Jesus responded to the disciples begging for more faith. All I could hear was the "worthless slaves" part. But, now it is like I can hear Jesus saying to those doubting a beleaguered disciples, "faith isn't even what you need to have more of to follow me and do what I have commanded!" What you need is love!! The kind of love that motivates you to go out and do for others what you would have them do for you. Without expecting praise or to earn God's love, nope, you just go out and do what is required of you by your love for one another.

And so we do. We host clothing swaps, fill up food cupboards, read the bible, gather in prayer circles, we sit beside someone who is dying, we come to church on a Sunday morning, and on a Monday morning, and a Wednesday afternoon, and a Thursday afternoon..., we eat this bread and drink this cup. We learn how to love better, how to open the doors wider, how to make sure everyone feels welcome and included here. And somewhere, in the midst of doing—just doing what we figure we ought to do—somewhere in the midst of all that—we become Christians. And they know we are Christians by our love.

Today, we come to this table of love, where Jesus showed us what it means to truly serve others in love—to pour out our lives of faith—with Christians all around the world who are doing the same. Where all are welcome and nothing divides us anymore.

And, miraculously, even when we are just going through the motions, just taking a piece of bread, just drinking from the tiny cup—just because that's what they are supposed to do on world-wide communion Sunday—even then, when we're just doing it because we think that's what we should do... we live out our faith and live into our calling as Jesus' disciples. And they will know we are Christians by our love.

This is a gift of God—for the people of God. Thanks be to God.