

From beginning to end,
the Bible urges us to contemplate the essence of faith.

One could even say
that the scriptures are founded upon faith,
consistently inspired by the Spirit of faith
to guide us into a deeper understanding.

However, what truly defines faith?

As theologian Paul Tillich noted,

"Faith is the most misunderstood word in the religious vocabulary."

Despite the Bible's central focus on faith, its true meaning often eludes us.

In our culture,
faith is often dismissed as anti-intellectual,
a choice to settle for easy answers
and accept things without evidence.

Yet, this societal dismissal
bears no resemblance to the "faith" depicted in the Bible.

Biblical faith is not below reason;
it is always above reason, encompassing it.

So, what exactly constitutes this true faith?

Faith is an attitude of trust in the presence of God.

Faith is an openness to God's revelations, actions, and invitations.

It means having faith in God,
recognizing that we can never be in control.

This is why faith transcends reason;
if we could fully comprehend God,
we could then precisely calculate and accurately predict,
essentially putting ourselves in charge.

We wouldn't use terms like
"calculating precisely,"
"predicting accurately,"
or "having it all figured out"
to describe our relationships with loved ones such as a spouse or a best
friend. Human relationships don't operate that way.

Instead, they are built on a growing foundation of trust.

This deepened level of trust is what the Bible refers to as faith.

What do we learn from our gospel lesson this morning about faith?

Jesus said to the apostles, "If you had faith the size of a mustard seed,
you would say to this mulberry tree,
'Be uprooted and planted in the sea and it would obey you.

Many of us intellectually assent to God's existence,
with polls showing a majority of Americans believe in God.
However, this abstract belief often falls short of faith.
Genuine faith involves more than just intellectual agreement;
it is lived out as deep trust and confidence in God,
leading to a complete surrender of one's life to God.

A core tenet of faith is recognizing that your life is not your own.
We are not the architects of our existence,
nor are we in ultimate control.
Instead, we are an integral part of God's magnificent plan.
To internalize this truth and live by it is to embody faith.

Jesus's statement,
"If you had faith the size of a mustard seed,
you would say to this mulberry tree,

'Be uprooted and planted in the sea and it would obey you,'"

uses hyperbole to illustrate a profound truth.

When we embrace a transformed perspective of trust,

remarkable events can unfold.

If we possess faith— confidence and reliance on God—

we tap into a power, as Paul describes, that is already active within us.

This power is capable of accomplishing

infinitely more than we could ever ask or imagine.

Faith isn't about abandoning reason;

it's a confident trust in God's power.

It's the understanding that my life isn't about me,

but rather belongs to God.

The more we embrace this truth,

the greater the possibilities that can unfold..

The lives of the saints exemplify this truth.

Abraham abandoned his familiar surroundings, home, and security

to journey toward a destination God would reveal.

Abraham's trust in God's guidance and protection

sustained him until he reached that promised place.

Similarly, Moses, with unwavering faith in the God of Abraham, led the Israelites from bondage to the Promised Land.

The disciples, upon their first encounter with Jesus, also demonstrated a confidence, prompting them to forsake everything and follow Him.

There is St Francis of Assisi, a man who, in an act of profound trust and confidence in God, abandoned all his possessions.

He gave away his money and even the clothes he was wearing, leaving town naked.

This mustard seed of faith that Francis possessed has blossomed into a worldwide movement spanning eight centuries.

Consider Mother Teresa, who left a comfortable life as a teacher in India to serve in Calcutta's most impoverished slums.

With no money or institutional backing, she ministered to the poorest of the poor,

possessing nothing but faith—faith as small as a mustard seed.

Consider the story of Maximilian Kolbe,
a Catholic priest imprisoned in Auschwitz.

When ten men were condemned to die,
one cried out about his wife and children.

Kolbe stepped forward,
offering himself in the man's stead, declaring,
"I'm a Christian, take me in his place."

This act, born from profound conviction,
exemplifies what the Bible defines as faith.

To deepen your faith and trust in God,
you must actively practice it.

As the apostles pleaded,
"Lord, increase our faith!"

we too seek this growth.

Our faith is strengthened as we pray,
read scripture, serve those in need, and live within community.

The more you trust, the more your faith will flourish.

Today's lesson presents an interesting contrast
between the concept of faith and the parable of the unprofitable servant.

In the parable,

a servant toils in the field all day,
only to be told by his master upon returning home
that he isn't deserving of a reward or special attention.

Instead, he is expected to serve his master's dinner
before he can attend to his own needs.

The servant in this story receives no praise
for merely performing his expected duties;
the master owes him nothing.

Jesus endeavors to challenge our preconceived notions of God.

We are indebted to God for everything,
including our very existence,
which is a gift.

Therefore, we are in no position to make demands of God.

Regardless of God's requests,
our appropriate response should be

that we have merely fulfilled our obligations.

This reflects an attitude of faith.

Faith isn't about unwavering belief without doubt;

rather, doubt is an intrinsic part of it.

As writer Anne Lamott suggests,

"The opposite of faith is not doubt,

but certainty.

Certainty is missing the point entirely.

Faith includes noticing the mess we're in,

the emptiness and discomfort,

and letting it be there until light returns."

Faith embraces uncertainty and discomfort, patiently awaiting clarity.

Cover to cover,

the Bible calls us to deepen our trust and confidence in God.

Who among us does not want more faith?

What if asking for more faith misses the point.

Jesus tells the apostles

that if they have faith the size of this tiny seed,

they have more than enough faith.

And I think that what Jesus is saying, to them and to us,

is that if we have any faith at all, it is enough.

Or, to put it another way,

if we have enough faith to ask for more,

then we already have enough.

Amen