

Meadowbrook Congregational Church

“Supersized Faith”

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Luke 17:5-10

5 The apostles said to the Lord, ‘Increase our faith!’⁶ 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.

7 ‘Who among you would say to your slave who has just come in from plowing or tending sheep in the field, “Come here at once and take your place at the table”?⁸ Would 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”?⁹ Do you thank the slave for doing what was commanded?¹⁰ So 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!”

One of the most controversial characters in American history was the Civil War general George B. McClellan. McClellan was a talented engineer and a very capable organizer. He graduated second in his class at West Point in 1846. He travelled to Europe to learn about siege operations and cavalry attacks, having a saddle named after him. He had great success in battle during the Mexican War in the 1840’s. He rose through the ranks of the Army so that by 1861 he was named General in Chief of the Union army. McClellan specifically commanded the Army of the Potomac, the Union’s chief fighting group in the Peninsular campaign early in the war.

The Northern public and Union leaders, including President Lincoln hoped that the Army of the Potomac would not only protect Washington D.C., but advance rapidly upon the Confederate Armies in northern Virginia, defeating them and occupying the Rebel capital of Richmond, thereby ending the war quickly. To the frustration of Lincoln, General McClellan proved to be a cautious warrior. He tended to concentrate on conservative siege operations, letting his enemies dig in and gain strength. He worried about whether his troops had proper training and the best of equipment. He constantly overestimated the strength of the enemy facing him, requesting more troops before he would be bold enough to attack. When he did attack, he fought safely, using only part of his resources and allowing more cunning adversaries like Robert E. Lee to escape to fight another day. McClellan eventually became known to the Union press as “Mac the Unready” and “The Little Corporal of Unsought Fields.” McClellan’s post as General in Chief was taken away even as he continued to guide the Army of the Potomac.

Finally Lincoln had seen quite enough! Easy victory was turning into possible defeat. People in the North were turning away from the war effort while the South was being energized. Eventually McClellan was relieved of all of his duties in 1862. Lincoln

said this about his timid and cautious general, "If General McClellan does not want to use the army, I would like to borrow it for a time."

In the Scripture lesson this morning, the disciples make their plea to Jesus, "Increase our faith." There was a lot for them to do. There were so many problems for them to solve. There were expectations that needed to be met. They weren't certain they had the resources to do what was required of them. "Increase our faith," was their earnest request.

As disciples of Jesus today we face similar challenges. There are so many needs in our world. There are so many needs in our community. There are so many needs in our church. Can we handle what is required as us as children of God and as the body of Christ? The darkness of difficult economic times hangs over us like a persistent cloud. The institutions in which we tend to trust are in crisis. The world is suddenly much smaller and the threats we could dismiss years ago now seem to be next door. There is greater uncertainty. We are prone to be cautious. We are even encouraged by some to be fearful and even scared. There are more demands upon our time and our energy and our money and there is less of our time and our energy and our money to go around. We see scarcity, obstacles, and division. We certainly feel as if we need more of what it is that God has to offer. We might be tempted to say with the disciples, "Jesus, increase our faith." The solution is more faith!

In 2004 director Morgan Spurlock starred in his own documentary *Supersize Me*. He ate nothing but McDonald's food for a month, agreeing to the "supersize" if asked. He gained over 20 pounds and his health deteriorated. Part of Spurlock's point was that the fast food industry preys upon customers, offering to us unhealthy food in quantities we really don't need. No one can refuse a "supersize." More of what we like is always a good thing, right? Having more is always the answer and until we have more, it seems we don't have enough.

Yet Jesus gently tells his disciples- and us, "You already have enough faith. Put what you have into practice. Use what you already have." He gives a vivid image. Faith, the size of a mustard seed could move a mulberry tree and plant it in the sea. God can work in you in all circumstances and situations.

Increase our faith! Supersize us! Patricia de Jong writes that "faith is our openness to how God's power might be used in us." We can't measure faith. We can't compare our amount of faith to another's. We can't order more faith from Amazon or ebay or build more faith in the garage. We can't get more simply by reading a book or taking a course or two in proper faith development. Faith is a gift. Through the grace of God we already have enough to use. That is the key. We have to use it.

I think of the boy who told everyone that when he got taller, he was going to be a professional basketball player. But he would wait until the day in which God would bless him with more height before he would do anything about his desire. He did not practice, he would not exercise, he would not eat right, and he would not learn more about the game. He was waiting until the time was right and he had more of what he needed to play. While waiting to grow, the game of basketball passed him by.

Jesus tells us that we already have the faith we need to be the kind of people God wants us to be. It is a gift whose size can't be measured or quantified. But it is a gift that needs to be exercised and used.

How can our faith increase? Participate. Go to work. Don't be an observer. Become active in something that breathes life to your kernel of faith. Embrace an idea of ministry and encourage others to join you in it. While being on the rolls of church membership is fine and while participating in the worship of God is fine, it is only by rolling up your sleeves and acting out in faith that faith grows.

Open yourself to the spirit. Pray. Let God's spirit move you to a new place, perhaps a place you had not imagined before. Don't wait until you are comfortable to move. Accept faith's challenge because faith wants to grow.

Trust. While your resources may seem especially small, what you have is valuable in God's eyes. You might not realize it but you are gifted. And while scarcity seems to be the main message of the church these days, you know, we need more time, more energy, and more money- that shouldn't stop us. If we are fulfilling what God intends of us here, we will find enough time to be present, enough energy to serve, and money to do what God calls us to do.

"Increase our faith," we cry! O God, give to us the answers we need. God, give us more time in our weekly schedule to serve. O God, give us more volunteers for our officers and boards. Dear God, give us more people to contribute to our limited budget. And Jesus looks at us- as small and weak and limited as we are, and says, "I have already given you enough faith to do what needs to be done. Act, using the faith you already have."