

“Please! Give us more faith!” The disciples are pleading with Jesus. No doubt they are feeling panicked, as they begin to understand the signs of the times. As they follow Jesus, the crowds he attracts are increasing. They see the situation with increasing clarity, a situation that includes corrupt officials, hypocrisy, politics awash with unsavory characters, a wealthy few, a growing legion of poor and ill.

Sound familiar?

The disciples follow Jesus because he confronts these troubles. Jesus heals the sick, discusses the law, and laments with us.

These times are tough, and we, like the disciples, feel we need to tank up on faith, bolster our reserves, ensure our survival by preparing carefully with stores of all the extras we will need to survive.

Our lamentations echo the Hebrew scriptures of Habakkuk:

O LORD, how long shall I cry for help,
and you will not listen?
Or cry to you "Violence!"
and you will not save?
Why do you make me see wrong-doing
and look at trouble?
Destruction and violence are before me;
strife and contention arise.

So the law becomes slack
and justice never prevails.
The wicked surround the righteous--
therefore judgment comes forth perverted.

Like the prophet, Habakkuk, we petition for help, asking for what we need to survive --- including more faith. After all, Jesus has taught us about the importance of faith. Those he has healed, Jesus has said, “Your faith has made you well.” In sending the disciples on their mission, Jesus has said, “Take nothing for your journey – no staff, no bag, no food or money -- not even an extra set of clothing.”

Who wouldn't ask for the largest portion of faith possible? We've seen Jesus perform miracles – why not ask for more faith?

But Jesus tells us faith doesn't come in sizes. **Faith is faith.**

Wait. What?! Why doesn't faith come in sizes? If McDonald's can supersize my Quarter Pounder meal, then why can't Jesus supersize my faith? Because more is better, right? If a little faith is good, then it makes sense to gather up a whole big bunch of faith.

Actually, in our Gospel lesson a couple of weeks ago, Jesus goes on record saying, “Whoever is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much.” Meaning if faith is there at all, it's welling up inside you. There's plenty there to tap into.

This week, Jesus goes on to say, "With faith the size of a mustard seed, you could do spectacular things, impossible things. You could say to this tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it would obey you."

This mustard seed. Tiny, isn't it? Yet the mustard seed is capable of the impossible. It grows into a plant that flourishes in the most inhospitable conditions, germinating in the dry desert heat without much water, growing from this speck into a huge tree! It seems the power of this mustard seed is difficult to measure.

Likewise, faith is difficult to measure. Faith, like love, like life, is eternal. Faith, like love and like life, is limitless. But it can be difficult for us to understand the concept of "limitless." Nearly everything we experience we measure in terms of certain quantity. For example, we are keenly aware of time, which we measure carefully. We measure sunlight, darkness, rain, snow, wind, crops, food, drink, work, play...

As humans, we perceive life in measurable quantities, we think about what we need to live, the wealth we need to fulfill those needs. We tend to think in terms of either scarcity or abundance. And no wonder! We live in a world where people suffer because they lack the basics of food and shelter.

We humans need to take care of our fundamental needs. Those of us who have experienced hunger, abuse, lack of love, lack of shelter, we understand why the disciples are focused on getting what they need to ensure their survival.

And Jesus has taught them that FAITH is the good stuff, he has taught us that FAITH is the thing we need to sustain ourselves; that FAITH is what we all need to flourish.

So it is no surprise that the disciples plead with Jesus, saying, “Give us more faith.” They think about faith as a kind of currency, a kind of wealth to spend, like one of these (a dollar).

I wonder: do we treat faith like a dollar? Do we expect our faith to “buy” us favor with God? Perhaps this is the foundation of our petitionary prayer, when we ask God to mend our lives. This is our fear talking, our scarcity mentality.

Jesus teaches us that faith is not like a dollar. Faith is like a seed. A seed that is planted grows, bears fruit, and produces more seed, which yield more plants and more fruit and more seeds...

Faith is eternal. But that does not mean that faith is easy.

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I would like to share a personal story. In 2004, I began attending New Song with my partner and two small boys who were 6 and 4 years old. Life was busy, my energy felt like a precious commodity that I needed to spend very carefully as we balanced basic needs of food, livelihood, and sleep.

We were balancing all our needs, including our need to come to church at New Song, where we felt welcomed and where we thought our boys could plant their seeds of relationship with the Creator of the universe.

It was not always easy to attend. Tired from the week, sometimes we just wanted to sleep in, but we could not ignore our longings to be in this spiritual space with our friends in this wonderful New Song community.

One February night in 2004, I had a vivid dream. I heard the words “THE SEED TURNS ITSELF INSIDE OUT.”

In the dream, I am suddenly aware that I am the seed. I am underground, surrounded by a blanket of soil. It is cold and dark, and I am alone and very afraid. Still, I can sense the promise of warmth and light coming through the soil. It is lonely, yet I can sense the presence of a connected ecosystem.

I am aware of forces outside myself, but I feel terribly isolated. Fear builds. I cry out, feeling a powerful urge to express the pain of that exploding fear. I am small, but I have energy inside. “THE SEED TURNS ITSELF INSIDE OUT.” I hear those words again and suddenly, I realize that I am NOT feeling fear. I am feeling the expanding. I can feel the cracking open of my outer shell as I literally turn inside out, like doing a summersault inside my skin while emerging from it.

I am germinating, using the reserves inside my seed-self to become my plant-self.

Germination requires shedding, letting go into the vulnerability of becoming a seedling, a shell surrendering its tough self to become tender leaves, tender leaves turning their edges outward to push into growth and strength. Heading through soil, bursting into sunlight, I realize the struggle has been transformed. Fear has been transformed. The seed has been transformed into a plant, taking in the rays of the sun, the nutrients of the soil. Bearing fruit, creating seed, planting the thoughts of lives to come.

“THE SEED TURNS ITSELF INSIDE OUT.” With these words, I learn that God’s creative forces are inside each of us. Everything I need has been inside me all along.

It took me a long time to understand this dream. And I’m not alone. We all hear such messages, we all have God within, speaking to us about the world inside us. Our gospel message today helps us know this: Jesus reminds us that everything we need is packed tightly into this tiny mustard seed, inside our tiny mustard seed bodies, inside our tiny mustard seed ideas, organizations, communities, nations, world, universe, atoms, each of us. The potential for growth, renewal, blessed vulnerability, and joyful strength are inside each of us. Always.

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Twenty-five years ago, New Song germinated from a seed of an idea to grow a new church, the first new church in Iowa in decades. New Song was a “church

plant” in the corridor area. God’s “odds and ends” packed inside this tiny church plant have turned inside out in ways we never could have predicted.

It’s been 25 years of blessing, growth, and community. It has not always been easy, and we have drawn on our faith. We have faith that our mutual ministry seed continues to allow us to gather around the idea of ministering with and to one another.

We don’t know what’s coming, but we do know we have a community in which we are able to be ourselves, grow with one another, experience radical welcoming of every human being, practice in the ways of love, care for all creation, be open and aware of God’s call to be kind, advocate for others, and insist on justice.

Today, we measure our time together, celebrating our 25 years of service through Christ, with Christ, and in Christ. Today, we also celebrate our ongoing germination, a seed of what we have yet to become. Today, we celebrate our boundless faith, our boundless bounty packed inside this place.