

Everything Is Possible

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Matthew 17:14-20

14 When they came to the crowd, a man came to him, knelt before him, 15 and said, "Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is an epileptic and he suffers terribly; he often falls into the fire and often into the water. 16 And I brought him to your disciples, but they could not cure him." 17 Jesus answered, "You faithless and perverse generation, how much longer must I be with you? How much longer must I put up with you? Bring him here to me." 18 And Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of him, and the boy was cured instantly. 19 Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, "Why could we not cast it out?" 20 He said to them, "Because of your little faith. For truly I tell you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you" (NRSV).

When Jesus came down from the mountain with Peter, James, and John he was immediately confronted with real world problems. I want to make sure we understand the setting. We are at a turning point in his ministry. Up until now he has been avoiding Jerusalem due to the plot to kill him. Now the time has come for him to begin his journey to Jerusalem. He knows that he will suffer and die. I imagine that this fate is weighing heavy on his shoulders but Jesus is so cool and calm that we do not see any burden on him. He gets to the crowd and is confronted with someone who desperately needs him.

The man pleads with Jesus. Notice the degree of this man's faith. Though the disciples disappointed him, the man still had faith in Jesus. So, he begs and pleads with Jesus to heal his son. He kneels before Jesus. This is a reverent approach to deity. He also addresses Jesus as Lord. This is a title used by someone that believes in him.

What happened to the disciples? In chapter 10 Jesus sent the disciples out on a mission and specifically granted them authority to heal, cure every disease, and every sickness. Now, in the absence of Jesus they are unable to cure the boy. Jesus is troubled by the failure of the disciples. At this point he is headed to the cross. He needs to be able to trust that the disciples can carry on in his absence. So, Jesus does the healing. The disciples want to know why they failed. The answer that Jesus gives them hits home "because of your little faith."

Matthew drives home a lesson on faith. The disciples failed because of little faith. We know that little faith is a problem for us today. We see it all around us. In the Bible we see that having little faith is a problem that even Jesus had to face. Sometimes Jesus can send them out and count on them. Sometimes they let him down. The disciples are distracted by the challenges of life and have retrogressed to the spiritual level of the multitude.

The focus of the Scripture is about what the followers of Jesus need to do. There is a contrast between little faith and mustard seed faith. Little faith loses confidence in God's power. Little faith will argue, or complain, and is full of excuses like the job is too big or the need is too great. Little faith moves from complacency where people are Ok in their comfort zones, to the distraction of temptations and being tricked, to the despair and defeat of being lost. Mustard seed faith has hope in the ultimate victory of God. It knows God's saving purpose prevails over all that opposes it. Mustard seed faith walks in the footsteps of Christ, fixes what is broken, and works diligently for God's glory. Mustard seed faith loves every minute of working for God's glory here on earth.

The Scripture shows a contrast between the glory of the transfigured Christ on the mountain and the human condition of the world. A typical day in ministry gets the distractions of

human need. Someone needs or wants something, they are hungry and need a meal, or want help with a water bill or electric bill, or they are homeless. But the thing is these problems are not really distractions, they are opportunities for us to represent Jesus to the world around us because we are Christians. We are molded after Christ. Other people are to see Christ in our behavior, attitudes, and action. We are to be a calm presence so that they can trust in someone that cares. Actually it goes both ways. They are to see us as representatives of Christ through our attitudes and actions and we are to see them as Christ in their need. So, they are also opportunities to serve Jesus in the world because Jesus said whatever you do for the least of these you do for me. The human condition always has unmet needs. It is both physically impossible and financially impossible to meet all of the need that exists in our society.

I will conclude with this thought. Jesus cannot do it all by himself. He needs his Disciples as his personal agents to do the Christian mission in the world. Jesus needs disciples to carry on in his absence, to do all of the things that he is doing: teach others about the love of God and heaven, take care of the sick, make disciples and teach them to obey everything. The modern church today should be about being the disciples of Jesus as the personal agents of Christ in the world around us.

Be careful. Do not slip away into the realm of little faith where complacency is the norm and it is easy to be distracted by the challenges of life and slip further away into defeat. It is easy to feel Christ in a moment of prayer and it is easy to feel close to God in church. But the world is full of challenges that could set us back. These challenges also present opportunities to do the mission of Jesus in the world. Have some mustard seed faith. Focus on the ultimate victory of God and walk in the footsteps of Christ. Nothing is impossible for you because with Jesus everything is possible.