

## “Enough is Enough?” February 21, 2010

I don't know about you, but I was utterly glued to the TV watching what was going on in Haiti in the aftermath of that devastating earthquake. Probably some of you know that some people from the mother church, St. Luke's, were actually in Haiti when the quake happened, and all survived, but continue to struggle with the shock and sadness of what they experienced there.

In the midst of all the bad news, there were stories of rescue and survival, and one in particular really captured my attention. It was the rescue about a week after the earthquake of a woman who was in the supermarket that collapsed. Her husband maintained a vigil at the market, certain that she was alive under the rubble, and ultimately he was proven right. Rescuers found her and worked to free her. When they finally pulled her out of the debris, she was singing! Singing! Singing a song of hope, faith and praise!

To be quite truthful, watching the footage of that rescue really humbled me, because I'm not sure that, had I been in the same situation, I would have come out of there like that. Most of us probably never know how we would respond in similar circumstances, but it certainly caused me to wonder, and part of that wondering had to do with my faith. Would my failure to do that mean that I didn't have enough faith? What is enough?

Now this struggle is heightened a bit by the stories of other people of faith who didn't make it out alive. Two of those were men I knew slightly—leaders of UMCOR—the United Methodist Committee on Relief. They died in the collapse of the Hotel Montana in Port-au-Prince, and I can guarantee you that both of them were people of deep faith—people who had committed their lives to the church and to living out their faith helping those in developing countries find a better life. But what do we do with the fact that they had faith, but didn't survive. Did they not have enough faith?

This issue of having enough faith is one the disciples struggled with and questioned Jesus about. This is how the story in Luke's gospel is told:

The apostles said to Jesus, “Make our faith greater.”

Jesus answered, “If you had faith as big as a mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, ‘Pull yourself up by the roots and plant yourself in the sea!’ and it would obey you.”

Jesus is trying to let his friends know that faith is the greatest force in the world, and having faith means that even something that looks totally impossible could become possible if approached with faith. And remarkably, he's not talking about having a ton of faith, but rather having even the tiniest inkling of faith is enough. He uses the analogy of one of the smallest seeds in the world—the mustard seed, and says that tiny amount of faith is enough to empower us to overcome seemingly insurmountable odds. It gives us the courage to try what we might otherwise avoid. Faith gives us the strength we need to face difficult challenges with grace and hope.

Faith is a word we use a lot, sometimes carelessly saying, “We just have to have faith.” But what does that mean, really? Do we have to make certain professions of faith to have it? Do we have to prove we have it? How do we know if we have faith?

Part of the problem is that faith is not tangible. We can't really touch it, taste it, smell it. Rather, it's more like an imperceptible nudge, a persistent thought. It's like a young boy who confessed that he had faith, but adults kept challenging him, asking “Did God speak to you?” “Did you see a vision?” “How do you know you have faith?” For a few minutes, the child was stumped for a response. Finally he told them, “It's like when you catch a fish. At first, you can't see or hear the fish; you just feel it tugging on the line. That's how it is with God; I could feel God tugging at my heart.”

Do you feel God tugging at your heart? My hunch is that you wouldn't be here unless that was the case. Why bother to get up on Sunday morning in the middle of February and come to The Garden, unless there's something tugging at us? We can't always see it or prove it, but we feel it.

The writer of Hebrews said it like this: “To have faith is to be sure of the things we hope for, to be certain of the things we cannot see.” Others have made similar proclamations. For instance, William Arthur Ward wrote, “Faith is knowing there is an ocean because you have seen a brook.” The theologian Fredrick Buechner said, “Faith is not being sure where you're going but going anyway.”

Faith is more like trust than anything else, I think. It's being willing to put our whole weight on God; it's giving our heart to God. Carter Heyward said this: "Faith is a process of leaping into the abyss not on the basis of any certainty about where we shall land, but rather on the belief that we *shall* land."

All of those comments have a common sense about them, and that is that they contain just a hint of doubt. I think we all could use a healthy dose of doubt now and then, because it says something about how seriously we take our faith and how willing we are to engage in this journey. I really believe that faith and doubt are two sides of the same coin. Theologian Paul Tillich talked about faith and doubt with these words: "Doubt is not the opposite of faith; it is one element of faith."

I have to admit to wondering what it would be like if, when I get to the end of my days on this earth, I discover that all this was just a figment of my imagination, that none of what I believed and had faith in was real. Then what? I guess where I come down is this: even if we're all wrong about this God-thing, I still believe living with faith is the better way to live, because faith is what gives our lives meaning and purpose.

You see, faith isn't just about mouthing the words. It's not saying, "I believe; I believe." It's more than that, because the power of faith is made visible when it goes into action. It's evident by how we live our lives; it's evident in being able to get outside ourselves and help others; it's evident in a generous spirit.

A few weeks ago, I mentioned Mitch Albom's new book, *Have a Little Faith*. The other story line that we didn't talk about has to do with the rabbi from his growing up days. The Rabbi has asked Albom to deliver his eulogy when he dies, and over the course of some eight years, Mitch visits with the Rabbi in much the same way he visited Morrie Schwartz that ended in the writing of *Tuesdays with Morrie*. Clearly, one of the topics they discussed had to do with faith, and at one point, the rabbi tells Albom, "Mitch, faith is about doing. You are how you act, not just how you believe." I believe he was exactly right.

And how do we act? We act in the most loving ways we can possibly muster; we show patience when we feel impatient; we speak kindly of one another and to one another. We refrain from making judgment calls about people or situations. We begin to remove ourselves from the point of thinking we're the center of the

universe, and allow ourselves to experience our shared humanity. We see the other citizens of the globe as our brothers and sisters, and begin to treat one another in kindness and love. Those things may sound like impossible tasks, but remember, with faith as small as a mustard seed, all things are possible.

A story that one of you gave me gives us a picture of the power of a little faith. A doctor told about being called out of bed early in the morning to tend a gravely ill patient who had just been admitted to the hospital. The call took him away from his early morning ritual of spending time with his sixth-grade daughter, who was the other person in their household who liked getting up early.

When he returned home, his daughter asked where he had been, and he described the situation where he had been, and he described the situation to her. He also told her that he had talked to the patient's family and had told them to hope for the best but to prepare for the worst. The girl processed the information he had shared, and then said, "I'll make him a get well card."

The next morning, true to her promise, she presented him with a card to take to the patient and his family. On the front was her hand-drawn picture of a bumblebee circling a row of flowers. Inside she had written a saying that she had borrowed from one of her favorite books. It said the following: "According to recognized aerotechnical tests, the bumblebee cannot fly because of the shape and weight of his body in relation to the total wing area. But the bumblebee doesn't know this, so he goes ahead and flies anyway. Get well soon."

Her dad promised to deliver the card as soon as he could, and left for the hospital. There, he discovered the situation had deteriorated, and he had to inform the family that his chances of recovery were probably less than 1%. He gave the man's wife the card his daughter had made, and exited the room as she began to cry softly.

In spite of the dire prognosis, the patient's wife kept an almost constant prayerful bedside presence. This continued for several days, when slowly, almost miraculously, the man began to show some signs of improvement. Even though there would be physical limitations to deal with, the man's survival became a reality!

The doctor couldn't help but wonder what had allowed him to recover. Yes, medical science had helped considerably, but the doctor also wondered about the power of faith and hope. The patient's wife answered some of his

wonderings, because on his last day in ICU, she presented him with a gift for his daughter. It was a jewelry box with a bumblebee brooch inside. It also included a card that said, "My prayer for you is that just as the bee can do what seemingly is impossible, as you grow into a beautiful lady you will continue to touch others and transform their lives in a great way. Your card was just what I needed, just when I needed it the most."

Faith—faith the size of a mustard seed. Do we have faith? Enough faith?

Closing:

Madeleine L'Engle wrote these words: "If it can be verified, we don't need faith. Faith is for that which lies on the *other* side of reason. Faith is what makes life bearable, with all its tragedies and ambiguities and sudden, startling joys."

As we leave here this morning, I'll leave you with words I often use to close a prayer: Thank you, God, for all that has been, and we put our trust in you for all that is yet to be." That's my expression of that mustard seed sized faith.

Have a good Sunday, and go in peace. Amen.