

# "Increase our Faith"

Luke 17:5-10

October 7, 2007

Jesus has been talking to his disciples about some important life issues. It is tough stuff. He has told those early followers that temptations and events that might lead us away from God are bound to come. We all know that to be true. In this life every one of us faces things that could very easily lead us into acts of sin ..... still the underlying call is for us to remain faithful to God and the life that He has invited us into. - - - Jesus also speaks of living the Christian life. Some of the things that God asks of us are difficult to do. Still Jesus challenges His disciples to remain faithful to God and the life that He has invited us into.

Their response ..... "Increase our faith". Boy, I hear them .... there are so many times when it is hard to hang on - times when we expect God to act in a particular way - - yet what we expect does not happen. There are those times when we face difficulties, hardships, trials, temptations, tragedy .... and we wonder about God and why God has not acted in the way in which we might hope God may act - - yet what we hope or expect does not happen and our faith is shaken. How easy it can be to join the disciples in praying that Jesus would "increase our faith". ..... I have to tell you that I struggle with faith issues. How I long to have my faith increased.

And yet, Jesus tells us that the size of your faith is not the factor. If it were about size, a mustard seed size faith could 'move mountains'. But if living the Christian life is not about the size or amount of our faith, then how can we talk about this thing called faith that is so much a part of our discussions that deal with Christ and His Church and how we live a Christian life?

I think often of the comment that Mother Teresa made on an occasion when she had been introduced to an audience as a woman of great faith. Her response was to say that 'she was not a woman of great faith but a woman of small faith in a great God.'

There is an illustration that was used by the great English preacher, Charles Spurgeon. He told that there were two men who happened to have been in a small boat somewhere in the calmer waters above the Niagra Falls. It seems that, without really noticing, they got too close and began to be drawn toward the swift current that eventually would take them over the falls. They quickly became aware of the power of the current and soon understood that there was nothing that they could do to save themselves against the power of the mighty current. People on shore also were aware of what was happening and watched in horror as the current brought them toward the falls and even managed to swamp their boat, throwing them into the water. It seemed as though it hardly mattered if they were in the boat or not - all would be carried over the edge and destroyed. Confused, they drifted toward

disaster. As they did, one became aware of a rope that had been thrown toward them by some of the people on shore and was now floating in the water nearby. In desperation, that man reached out and grabbed the end of the rope. The second man spotted a large log bobbing nearby and managed to reach it - throwing his arms around it in a confused attempt to avoid drowning. It is not difficult to imagine the end of the story. One, with a tenuous hold on the rope was dragged to safety - the other, clinging to a huge log went over the edge and was never heard from or seen again. Faith is not a matter of size. It does not come in a cup size - you can not put 4 cups of faith together and have a quart of faith. Faith, rather, is a matter of connection. It did not matter how much of the rope that man in the water had a hold of - what mattered most was that it was connected to people on shore. Grabbing the rope instead of the log certainly made a difference. Certainly, that man might well have prayed or hoped that he would have the strength to hold on - but more rope would not have made the difference. Those on shore, pulling him in - they made the difference.

Still we pray - "Increase our Faith" - but God tells us to hold on tight to the rope He has thrown to us. Faith is not easy. The current of the world pulls us toward disaster and we choose whether or not to hold on to the rope of faith when the waters splash around us, often so violently that we can not see the one on the shore calling desperately for us to hold on.

I read an article in which the author suggested that *"Faith is either dead earnest or just dead."* I kind of like that. I can imagine the man coming closer and closer to the Niagra Falls - feeling the increasing tug of the churning waters - desperately holding on to the rope - you hang on with deadly earnest or you die.

Have you seen the rope that our God has thrown toward you - it is faith. Cling to it. What else might you cling to that will not carry you over the falls toward destruction?

I really enjoy today's OT text from the book of the prophet Habakkuk. The prophet has tried everything but life is not easy for him. There is so much pain, suffering and violence in his world that he does not know how to deal with it any more. And the worst part is that he prays and prays and it does not seem as though God is doing anything to change his situation. He has not seen and does not understand the rope that he has thrown out to him. And so he cries out to God - looking for answers - accusing God of not even listening. But finally, in the second half of the text, we hear God speaking. God's response is not to justify his actions or explain the events taking place in the world around them - His response is simply to call for His people to "live by their faith".

It is a tough thing when we believe our faith is in short supply - it is tough when we don't know how we might do that or what that might require of us - perhaps it means to hang on to the rope when the waters roar around us - cling to the God who reaches out to save us even when we can not understand how it is even possible for

**Him to save us. The Gospel text talks about being 'worthless slaves doing only that which is our duty'. Clearly, even though these are the words of Jesus as He tells this parable, he never sees us as worthless or slaves - but in fact does just the opposite of what the parable suggest - He, as the Master, washes the feet of the disciples - He dies to save us His servants. Saved by this mighty God, we, His servants are called to simply do what we are supposed to do. A friend simply puts is, "Do the next right thing". Trust God - hold on to the rope - with little faith or mature, developed and well worn faith - it is the mighty God who saves.**

**AMEN**