

## I WISH I HAD A FAITH LIKE THAT

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“Increase our faith, Lord.” “Lord, increase our faith.” How often I have heard variations on that theme. I wish I had more faith. If I could only have her faith. Look at her. Look at him. Look how strong they are. I wish I could have faith like that.

The historic giants of the faith come to mind. In the letter to the Hebrews, after the definition of faith in chapter 11, the author reminds us of these giants of faith.

Noah, who being warned by God of events yet unseen, constructed an ark saving his family and thereby actually saving the world.

Abraham and Sarah went out to a place unknown to them, yet obeying God they reached the Promised Land and gave birth to descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore – a great nation.

Moses resisted the oppression of the Pharaoh and led the people of God into the wilderness and on to the Promised Land.

The people themselves by faith crossed the Red Sea as if by dry land.

And there was Rahab, Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets. The giants of faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, received promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched raging fire, escaped the edge of the sword, won strength out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. These were ordinary people, some even less than ordinary, a murderer and a prostitute, a shepherd and a warrior, but they endured suffering and by faith survived and

triumphed. I wish I had a faith like that. "Lord, increase my faith."

We see around us acquaintances, friends, family members who seem to live with confidence and courage, securely, calmly, serenely. People who face each difficulty not as a crisis, but as an opportunity. People who, when they pause, are not despondent but optimistic. People who can even look death in the face without fear, but with hope. I wish I had a faith like that. "Lord, increase my faith."

Dr. Dean Edell told the story of a man who had a disease which made him prone to damage from the sun's rays. So severe was his disease that he could only go out in the daylight completely covered, even to the point of wearing a burlap mask. So severe was his condition that viewers were warned of the scenes they were about to see before they were shown. His ears are gone. Teeth protrude from what remains of his lips. His feet and hands are stumps. Yet he has a wife and a loving family. He supports them as a photographer. He comments that he has his problems, but during his long stays in hospitals he has seen many less well off than he is and he is thankful for what he has. What an attitude! I wish I had a faith like that! I wish I could meet my comparatively minor disturbances with the certainty of blessing as his life proclaims. "Lord, increase my faith."

Congregationally speaking, perhaps we need a corporate boost in our faith. We, King City United Church, are part of a cooperative ministry with New Hope and York Pines United Churches – York United Ministries. Although it has been three years, we are really still in the early stages. The pandemic has slowed us down. We only do a few activities together and we are still wondering how to make this work. Can we make this work? Why are we trying to make this work? It came out of crises in our congregations, uncertainty in our futures but a desire to be faithful and to undertake ministry in our communities. York United Ministries grew out of a faith that sees opportunity in crisis. Now we need a faith that is convinced that God is still with us, a faith that dares to act rather than react, a faith that risks

being God's people in an alien world. I wish we had a faith like that. "Lord, increase our faith."

"If you had faith as a grain of mustard seed," Jesus said, "you could say to this tree, 'Be uprooted up, and be planted in the sea,' and it would obey you." If you had even that much faith the impossible will not only be possible, it would be accomplished.

What an odd answer. Is Jesus belittling the disciples? Is he belittling us? "Increase your faith? Why you have no faith at all. If you did, you could do miracles."

No, this is not a denial of faith. It is Jesus' faith affirmation. It is revelation. Jesus is telling them about the reality of faith. Faith can move mountains. Faith can do seemingly impossible things. Faith is the most powerful force on Earth. So powerful that even a pinch can transform people and change the course of history. You don't need more faith. Even a mustard seed's worth is more than you need. What Jesus gives us is a vision of possibility.

How is this helpful? If I already have the faith I need, why would I ask for more? Obviously, I don't feel that I have sufficient faith. I feel impeded. I feel weak, held back, inadequate. I feel that I need more faith. "Lord, increase my faith." Yet Jesus says that even a little faith is sufficient. I already have enough faith. All I need to do is act on that faith. I have to live as if I have faith.

How is this? Because surrounding us is a vast spiritual reservoir of energy. Just as around us is the physical environment from which we gather all we need, so around us is also a spiritual environment. Faith is not something purely within yourself. We can't pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps. It's not our willpower, but God's gift of power that uplifts and enables us. We are like boats in a lock. The water comes from above. And raises us to new levels. All we need to do is open the gates and sail into new realms of faithful activity. What is important is not the psychology of the personality or even the sociology of the community, but the theology of the divine presence of God's Spirit in our lives.

Today we celebrate the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. The old invitation to the table says, "Eat and drink for your strengthening that you may grow in grace and be blessed with all spiritual blessings." Later we hear the words, "This is the body of Christ broken for you." "This is the blood of Christ spilled for you." This is true not because I say so. It is nothing to do with me. This is true not because the community says so. This is true not because of some kind of mass hypnosis. This isn't voodoo or magic. It's true because God says so. All that remains is to receive the gift as it is offered – freely.

If this be so with faith, then why do I still cry, "Lord, increase my faith"? Why do I still not feel strengthened? Why do I still lack something? Because I do. I lack action. There is something we must do. "Rekindle the gift of God", Paul says. "God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power." "Rekindle the gift of God." Don't let it go out! Use it! Use the gift of God. Stir the embers. Bonhoeffer has said that God gives us the faith we need, but no more, lest we depend on ourselves rather than God. Rekindle the gift. Stir the embers. And let faith burst into flame.

You see what is needed is firsthand rather than second-hand faith. We can go around as long as we want saying we believe this and we believe that, but until we try the faith, it means nothing. We can speak in human tongues and tongues of angels. We can have prophetic powers. We can even have within us such great faith that we can move mountains. But until it becomes action, until it becomes love, until we use it, it is nothing. "Lord, increase my faith." "Why? You don't use what you have now!" God says. "Use what you have and I will make sure that you have enough. Even a mustard seed portion is enough to make trees obey you."

We see the giants of faith, those of the past and those of the present. They seem special. They are, but not because of their faith, but rather because they use the faith they have.

Look at those friends that you think so strong. You think they have more faith than you? No. But their faith is firsthand.

They use it. They use it and so they are used by God. And as instruments of God, they have peace and inner calm. The substantial results we see by those we think are more faithful are evidence of substantial reality of energy and power available to be tapped by all of us. They are not empty cisterns dependent on the whims of chance and fortune, but artesian wells filled and replenished from endless hidden depths. What they do is not so much through their own efforts, but rather because there is someone else, God, working through them.

I wish I had a faith like that. We already have. It's God's gift, a spirit, not of timidity, but of power and action in love and self-control. Rekindle the gift and the power of God will burn within. Amen.