

**Quantum Faith**  
**Sermon on Sunday, October 2, 2022**

**Dear church,**

Every so often I hear people say, “I struggle with my faith.” “I’m not so sure about my belief in God.” And before I go into all out defensive mode, trying to fix someone else’s faith, I stop myself. And I say to myself, “You know what? That’s a healthy experience for any good Lutheran.” I mean, how can you not struggle with something that’s invisible, spiritual, ethereal and per definition beyond scientific proof? What surprises me is that people are surprised about being on shaky ground, as if religion were supposed to be as safe as a postal service pension! Oh, I forgot, Jim Friling told me that the postal pension may not be safe forever either! What is safe forever? Only God is safely there forever. That’s the unshakable part of my faith. All the other parts of my faith move around from time to time, and I must dance with them.

In today’s gospel, the apostles are struggling with the same problem. They come to their guru and say, “Give us a bit more security and control over this religion thing. C’mon, increase our faith!” And Jesus makes fun of them. Please forgive Jesus, he sometimes made fun of people when they approached him with ridiculous questions and demands! He didn’t always say the nice and pious things that were expected of a clergy person. Instead, he redirected their request to something much safer, much easier, much more grounded: service. Become good servants, he suggests in the second part of this story. Do what God needs you to do in this world and then shut up. Don’t worry so much about your faith. Even atheists can clean toilets or help someone, right?

See, this is not the familiar parable of the mustard seed, although Jesus uses the mustard seed here as he does in the other parable to make a point about the power stored in the tiniest seed of faith that is planted in our souls. But this time our Lord stretches the metaphor beyond the breaking point. “If you have faith like a mustard seed,” he says, “just say to this mulberry tree to be uprooted and grow in the sea.” Can you see Peter’s facial expression as he listens to this? You bet it wasn’t what he wanted to hear. I don’t know

about you, but to me this sounds like total non-sense. Who needs a mulberry tree in the sea? Yeah, that's exactly the point.

If people had control over their faith, if people had true "spiritual power" they would do all kinds of crooked and weird and self-serving things, because people always find a way to abuse power. We are reminded of that every day, from Russia all the way to the United States. Power corrupts and the last thing we need is to have power over our faith.

Your faith, if it is in fact "your" faith – is not something that you can secure, nail down, manipulate and call up at will. It doesn't belong to you and that's the beauty of it. It will grow when it wants to. In the meantime, there are important things for us to do in the service of God: visiting and taking care of the elderly; supporting the work of justice; giving of your time and treasure and talent, the old stewardship slogan; engaging in something that brings hope to this world. All of these are servant things to do. It doesn't take a spiritual superman or superwoman. It takes faithfulness rather than pure faith.

Let me tease one more thing out of this story... Doesn't it almost feel as if Jesus is saying here, the smaller your faith is, the better??? Think about that! Just a little quantum of faith or a little quark or whatever the smallest particle is that physical science has defined by now, whatever that miniscule blip of energy is, it is enough as a source of life in God. Let it grow in you when it wants and don't worry too much about it. It will do just fine if you let it be!

That way you can't fall into the trap of false religion. You can focus on God and not on "your faith." I have mentioned the following quote a few times and please forgive me if you have heard it before, but I always found it very profound and still do. Mother Theresa said this back in her day when she was asked about her great faith. She was above all a servant of God, helping the poorest of people in one of the poorest cities in the world. Someone wanted to get an "in" about her great faith and asked her how she maintained it. She said something along the lines of, "I don't have a great faith. I believe in a great God." That change of perspective shifts everything. Try it sometime!

When people struggle with their faith it's often because they were taught certain beliefs and held onto them as if these beliefs were itself God. Once they start questioning parts of it, they feel like the ground is shaking. It can be especially difficult for people who were raised in the Catholic church with lots of certainties. "O my God, I'm losing my faith!" Well, Jesus is trying to teach us to rely less on belief systems and more on the presence of God in our imperfect lives, even in our imperfect religious lives, even when we're in doubt. Certainty is not desirable. Trust is. And trust is built when we do the work of God. Yes sometimes, we may pray, "Lord, decrease my faith! Lord, decrease my faith, so that I may come to you empty, so that you may fill me with your grace and your ideas and your love." Because when it's all said and done it's simple: Let God be God in you! **Amen.**