



2 Timothy 1:1-14; Psalm 37:1-9; Luke 17:5-10

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Who doesn't want to have more faith? The disciples asked for it from Jesus. Yet, Jesus' answer sounds a lot like a rebuke.

What prompted their request? First, Jesus' warning not to drive one into desperation that results in sin, and then his command to show patience and mercy, and forgive the repeat offender...even if the offense is as frequent as seven times and, on top of that, even it is reoccurs the same day!

It does take faith to trust God's claim that "Vengeance is mine"¹ so, don't go around angry, heart closed and acting on hurt feelings.² The disciples curled up their noses and resisted the demanding expectation of forgiveness,³ and perhaps that is the reason why they asked for more faith.

But faith is not quantifiable: one either trusts God or not. We do not enter into a tree tossing-mountain moving contest. It is true that on many occasions Jesus himself has called out the "little faith" of his disciples letting one think that it is

¹ Deuteronomy 32:35; Psalm 37:5-6; Romans 12:17-19

² Psalm 37:8

³ Luke 17:4; Matthew 18:22

possible to demonstrate more faith.⁴ But here, his frustration is palpable: their faith is not even comparable to the size of a tiny mustard seed. That much would be enough to trust God and forgive others. They are slow to understand and learn.

I get them. I get how in some contexts our faith feels very little and in need of a boost. When I look at the present social landscape and how ideology and politics have clearly divided us in two camps; when I see how wars and violence are creating orphans, maiming and killing people of any age both military and civilians, ruining the land and destroying the economy, I feel anxious for the world and hopeless for the future.

Sometimes, my faith needs a boost of encouragement like a new vision for the world filled with fresh hope. Sometimes, I feel inadequate and am not sure I have anything meaningful to give, that's when my faith needs affirmation. During those times I need to be steady and persevere. Sometimes, I feel so physically exhausted or so emotionally depleted that I just want to hide in a closet and cry. That's when my faith requires a firm recollection of God's faithfulness.

When one feels alone and discouraged, faith offers endurance. When one doesn't get the choices that other people make, faith requires patience and understanding. When afflicted with a life-changing disease; when facing an impending surgery; when the heart is broken over a severed

⁴ Luke 12:28. Jesus is consistent about this in multiple occasions in Matthew (6:30; 8:26; 14:31; 17:20)

relationship; when temptations assail us, all we need to do is keep trusting that God is with us, keep doing the loving thing, keep following the divine precepts, keep on living by God's Word, keep on doing what is right. With the words of the psalmist: "Commit your way to the LORD; put your trust in the LORD and see what God will do."⁵ We are not alone, we are loved, wanted, called into permanent relationship.

What we also need to remember is that we are part of a living Body, a community of believers constantly praying for one another. In the very moment we feel alone and under pressure, we need to remind ourselves that somewhere in this world and beyond someone is praying for us: the communion of saints is constantly offering intercessory and supportive prayer for one another.

Jesus used the harsh hyperbole in today's gospel because he was quite fed up with the disciples' race to the top, as presented in the gospel of Luke, constantly vying to be the greatest, the best and the most important. Their ongoing competitiveness kept them distracted and self-centered.⁶

Jesus wanted them to relax and be exactly who they were, acting on what faith, passions and talents God has given them. Just as slaves work at the master's pleasure and do what they are told to do, so do the disciples live everyday life doing what they are entrusted to do, each doing their job for

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⁶ Luke 22:24-30

the glory of God. No reward is expected, not necessarily in this life at least.

Yet, the “worthless slaves” part is rather a strident talk coming out of Jesus’ mouth. He has told us in many ways on numerous occasions that we are worthy the risk; that we are infinitely loved; that we are desired by God just as the bride is desired by the bridegroom.

Once again, Jesus’ use of strong language may reflect frustration and was likely meant to draw the disciples' attention.

Jesus, in other words, wanted his disciples to consider that there is no need to impress or try to please God. The focus of a godly life is not on what one can do to look good before God. The focus, instead, ought to be on what God has done for us. Faith flows out of it. Gratitude shapes hearts.

Generosity moves mountains. We respond to God’s grace in gratitude with abilities God has already given us. The reward is the expanded heart that results from our faith response.

But again, there are times when our faith feels inadequate and insufficient. Hence, Paul’s encouragement to Timothy in his 2nd letter: “rekindle the gift of God”⁷ (or “keep that ablaze,”⁸ or “stir up the gift of God”⁹).

⁷ New Revised Standard Version

⁸ The Message

⁹ American Standard Version

Timothy seems to be going through an extremely life altering and faith shaking experience and Paul reminds him that he, Timothy, has a sincere faith (v. 5) since he was brought up in a believing family. In fact, his faith goes back generations, and both his grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice are brilliant examples of that faith. He needs not to be afraid of suffering for the gospel for the One who has called him is faithful.

Paul encourages Timothy not to be ashamed to give his testimony about the Lord (v. 8 and v. 11), to hold on to sound teaching (v. 13), and to guard the good deposit of faith (v. 14).

There are ups and downs in life. But difficult and challenging moments need not discourage us. Simply remember.

Remember who God is. Remember who you are. Stir up the gift of faith in you that comes from the Spirit: “for God did not give us a spirit of cowardice but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline.” Be rooted in faith. Be bold. Be steady. Amen.