

Last week I traveled to the United Methodist Church of the Resurrection in Leawood, Kansas. This church started in 1990 in a funeral home with four people, which is why they named it “Church of the Resurrection.” It has now grown to 22,000 members and is the largest United Methodist Church in the nation.

Worship was grandiose. It included what seemed to be a two-hundred-person choir, a full orchestra, and praise band with multiple singers as well as a conductor. The sanctuary sat 3,500 people comfortably. I had never worshiped with that many people at the same time before.

As I sat in worship in the sanctuary I was in awe as I thought: “God can do more than we could ever believe or imagine.” I am sure those four people who started the church together could never have imagined what it would turn into twenty-nine years later.

Now this church is a leader of mission and ministry, it houses a college, it makes disciples and it is large enough to host the Leadership Institute Training event annually where Methodists can come from all over the nation each year to be trained and equipped for the glory of God.

What is amazing about the God we serve is that God is moving in mighty ways in Leawood, Kansas and God is moving in mighty ways right here in Rappahannock County.

The thing these two places have in common is the faith we share in Jesus Christ. **Today on this World Communion Sunday we celebrate that we are united with our brothers and sisters all over the world through our faith in Jesus Christ.**

Throughout our lives our faith takes on different forms. Sometimes we may feel full of our faith in Jesus Christ, and other times we may feel like Thomas and ask God to show up and explain things to us. Yet in our lectionary text today we see that Jesus reminds us that God can do amazing things through our lives if we only have the faith of a mustard seed.

It is one thing to have an understanding of faith in our minds and another to embody our faith through our hearts. James 2:17 tells us that “faith without works is dead.” When we embody our faith, we are called to take action. We surrender and allow the Holy Spirit to propel us forward to do the work of God.

Like the disciples in our lectionary text from the gospel of Luke, we too find that sometimes it is difficult for us to embody our faith...especially when it comes to forgiving others.

The 12 disciples were struggling with this very thing in earlier in Luke 17. Jesus named that not forgiving others was a stumbling block to them having faith. The disciples wanted to know how many times they should forgive someone and Jesus told them: “If another disciple sins, you must rebuke the offender, and if there is repentance, you must forgive. <sup>4</sup>And if the same person sins against you seven times a day, and turns back to you seven times and says, ‘I repent’, you must forgive” (Luke 17:3-4).

Jesus called them to forgive over and over again. The disciples knew they could not do this on their own, so they asked for Jesus to increase their faith. This was not the first time in Scripture a disciple of Christ asked for their faith to be increased.

In Mark 9 a father pleaded with Jesus to heal his sick son and said: “I believe! Help my unbelief!” (Mark 9.24). On our own we are not able to fully put our faith in Jesus Christ; we need God to help us. Like the disciples and the man with the sick son, our continued prayer should be for God to increase our faith.

We need God’s help as we embody our faith. Especially in the sacred act of forgiveness.

This past week, there was an amazing example of embodied faith through forgiveness. It happened at the sentencing hearing of a police officer who mistakenly shot and killed an innocent man she thought was an intruder in her apartment.

At the hearing, the family took time to share their impact statements, allowing her to know and understand the pain she caused by her actions. The victims’ family was upset and rightly so and these feelings came out in words of hatred towards her...that is until one family member spoke.

The eighteen-year-old younger brother of the victim took the stand and looked directly into his brother’s killer’s eyes and told her: “I love you just like anyone else ...Give your life to Christ. I think giving your life to Christ is the best thing [my brother] would want for you.” Then he stepped down from the witness stand and hugged her.”<sup>i</sup>

The court room was in shock and even the judge was crying. The District Attorney said: “In 37 years of practicing law, I never saw anything like that.”<sup>ii</sup>

True forgiveness can take our breath away. As our Bible Study studied Luke 15, the story of the Prodigal Son this past week, we too marveled at the way that the Father in the parable was able to forgive his younger son who squandered away his inheritance.

This is the life of faith that Christ calls us to: to forgive people even when we may feel like they don’t deserve it. We are called to forgive because through Jesus Christ on the cross, God forgave us of our sins.

In our relationship with God we must repent of our sins and God forgives us, but so often in our relationships with others repentance does not happen. Not forgiving other people only hurts us and gives that person power over us. Not forgiving others holds us back in so many areas of our lives. Offering forgiveness allows us to move forward and continue to do the work of God.

**Forgiveness is hard work, but it is possible through our faith in Jesus Christ.**

Faith is the foundation for who we are as the people of God. It was through faith in God that the Israelites wandered the wilderness for forty years. It was through faith that the prophets responded to God’s calling upon their lives. It was through faith that the first disciples dropped everything and followed Christ.

Faith is what gets us through the good days and the bad days. It is what we rely on, it is what brings us together each Sunday to worship and connects us with Christians across the world.

**The good news for our lives today is we only have to start with faith the size of a mustard seed and God will do the rest.**

In Luke 17:6: Jesus said, “If you had faith the size of a mustard seed, you could say to the mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea, and it would obey you.’”

Commentary tells us that Jesus chose the illustration of the mustard seed, because although it is among one of the smallest seeds, it grows to be about 15 feet tall.<sup>iii</sup> Although the mustard seed at it’s start may only be 0.1 inches in diameter it is a strong plant and can withstand even the largest storms.

We are like the mustard seed, but we need God’s care and our faith in Christ to continue to grow. God the Creator continues to tend our souls and foster redemption.

We see this at the start of our relationship with God in the garden of Eden. God the master gardener came looking for Adam and Eve in the garden. When looking for Jesus upon his death, Mary Magdalene mistook Jesus as the gardener. At the end of the Bible in Revelation 22 we see that the garden and humanity are restored through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Time and time again the Bible tells us that “nothing is impossible with God” (Luke 1:37). Having faith in Jesus Christ means we understand that we do not do life on our own. It means we understand that God works through us to bring about the kingdom of God on earth.

Through faith Jesus tells us we can move stubborn mulberry trees with their intense root systems and even “move mountains” (Matthew 17:20). The question before us today is are we willing to pray the same prayer as the father with the sick child: “Lord I believe! Help my unbelief.”

You may not be ready to forgive a loved one who has wronged you. You may feel like your faith is barely hanging on by a thread. If we can all have the faith of a tiny mustard seed God will show up in amazing ways.

What is the kind of faith God is requiring you to have at this moment? Will it come through studying the Bible more or confessing to a trusted friend? Will it come from forgiving someone who has wronged you long ago?

Perhaps it will come through communion as we remember that we are part of the community of God who has heard the same words of Jesus inviting us to a table of abundant grace. As we share in World Communion Sunday today, may we remember that God will increase our faith as we continue to seek after our relationship with God. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

## Endnotes

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<sup>i</sup> [https://abcnews.go.com/US/jury-deciding-sentence-police-officer-amber-guyger-wrong/story?id=66002182&fbclid=IwAR0l2OqTjNlQnG0ybk11Wu6-ODG0\\_Qt5mGi6ZCa1t-T4p-tozObqWQu9oI](https://abcnews.go.com/US/jury-deciding-sentence-police-officer-amber-guyger-wrong/story?id=66002182&fbclid=IwAR0l2OqTjNlQnG0ybk11Wu6-ODG0_Qt5mGi6ZCa1t-T4p-tozObqWQu9oI)

<sup>ii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>iii</sup> New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible. Vol. 4. Abingdon Press: Nashville, TN. 2009. P. 183