

Luke 17:5-6

It can and does happen that Christians get all hung up over faith. “Do I have enough faith?” “Is my faith strong enough?” “Sometimes I wonder, do I really even have faith?” If you have ever asked yourself questions like these, you are not alone in this. Many have been there. In today’s text we even see Jesus’ apostles going into panic-mode regarding their faith. “*Lord,*” they cry, “*Increase our faith!*”

We know, as do they, the importance of faith. We are saved by faith, and not by our good works. Without faith no one can please God. We are able to navigate through life only by faith, and not by mere sight. No wonder it’s so easy for us to panic, as do the apostles, about our faith.

Yet if anyone dares to question our faith, we immediately get defensive. “My faith is important to me...and I have a strong faith!” At times like these our faith may be like a blanket that we’re not really using, but when someone tries to take it away, we clutch it and act like it’s our most dearest treasure.

Our Lord has something to say about faith. When His apostles get all strung out over it, He calmly responds with the words, “*If you had faith like a grain of mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted, and planted in the sea,’ and it would obey you.*”

Have you ever seen a mustard seed? You might need reading glasses. It’s just over one millimeter in size. Don’t you think the apostles were stunned at Jesus’ words? They’re crying out for a bigger faith, and He holds out a mustard seed to them. Maybe they should be crying, “Lord, shrink our faith! Make it tiny, like a grain of mustard seed.”

Now Jesus is not wanting us to go around uprooting trees and planting them in the sea. He’s teaching us not to despair about our faith. That the size of our faith is not the issue, but rather is our faith genuine? It doesn’t matter that this seed is so tiny, but that it is a genuine mustard seed. Great faith in God is not so much required as genuine faith in God. And such genuine faith will perform miracles as impossible as moving mountains and uprooting trees.

So how do we know if our faith is genuine? Faith is, in its entirety, a gift of God. In your baptism, He gave you genuine faith; faith that can move mountains and uproot trees; faith that does the impossible: believing in a God you have not seen, hoping for a home in heaven you have not known, living in such a way that you put to death the sinful desires within you, loving the things of God more than the things of this world.

In your baptism God grafted you as a branch into Jesus who is the vine. The branch does nothing by itself, but only through its living connection to the vine. A vine will have big branches and small branches. But all its branches bear fruit because they are joined to the vine.

Just so with faith. The size of your faith is not what’s important, but that you are joined to Christ. He does the impossible within you. He produces the fruits of faith in your life. It’s all about Jesus and not all about your faith. Nowhere does it say in Scripture, “Fix your eyes on your faith.” But it does say, “*Fix your eyes on Jesus, the author and finisher of your faith.*”

This is the very thing Simon Peter failed to do. He was walking on the water toward Jesus. A strong faith? Perhaps. But you know what happened. Seeing the turbulent waves, he began to sink. No faith is strong when the eyes are fixed on something besides Jesus. Faith is genuine only when our eyes are fixed on Jesus. Was Peter saved by his faith? He was saved by Jesus. His cry, at that time, was not, "Lord, increase my faith!" But as he was sinking, he cried, "*Lord, save me!*"

Sometimes we need to be tossed into the waves as he was. And when we are, we can and do panic, and doubt, and sink. But why is this? It's because our eyes were not really fixed on Jesus. Simon Peter writes about this as one who truly knows. He says in his first epistle that various trials come to us so that our faith is tested to be genuine.

The trials God sends to you do not come because God enjoys torturing you, but because He loves you. Your faith cannot survive without trials in your life. Through much tribulation we enter the kingdom of heaven. And when tribulation comes, God does not want you to doubt your faith, and wonder if it's big and strong enough. He doesn't even want you to look at your faith. He wants you to look at Jesus. Look at Him who endured the tribulation of the cross for you. Look at Him who loved you to the point of death; who was willing, yes glad, to bear your sin and its punishment.

Faith is not placed in the Bible so that you worry about it. It's there to give you assurance. Try this the next time you get all worked up over your faith – replace the word faith with Jesus. We are saved by Jesus, and not by our good works. Without Jesus no one can please God. We are able to navigate through life not by mere sight, but by Jesus. So is your faith strong enough? Say, "My Jesus is strong enough! My Jesus is big enough!" "Do I even have faith?" "Who cares! I have Jesus, and He has me!"

And friend, He does have you. You are His...forever. You are forgiven by Him. All of you are. Don't look to your faith to see if these things are true. Look at the cross and see Jesus dying there for you. Look at your baptism into Jesus. Look at His Supper before you where He gives Himself to you. Fix your eyes on Jesus and let God worry about your faith. Amen.