

Go Forth Wave of Hope October 2, 2022. 2 Timothy 1:1-14 and Luke 17: 5-10

What is this faith that the apostles wanted Jesus to increase? Is it certain beliefs about Jesus? Is it confidence that they could do what Jesus wanted them to do? Or is it a deep trust, like when we say, "I have faith in you!" we really mean, "I trust you to the core."

When I read today's scriptures, I found them curious, especially the Gospel with that idea of testing our faith by saying to a mulberry tree "Be uprooted and planted in the sea!" What an absurd thing to say. What mulberry tree could survive, never mind root, in the sea?

Paul talked about faith as trust with Timothy and other followers who were finding their way after Jesus died. Paul wrote "But I am not ashamed, for I know the one in whom I have put my trust, and I am sure that he is able to guard until that day what I have entrusted to him...Guard the good treasure entrusted to you, with the help of the Holy Spirit living in us."

It seems to me that rather than approaching Jesus as teacher or brother the disciples in Jesus' time were approaching him as if he was a banker. They deposited their little bit of faith hoping he would raise the interest rate on their meager deposit! "Increase our faith!"

Like those of us who are frightened in our present day economy, these men and women were worried about being sent into the world with meager faith. They wanted to feel and appear confident. When they were asking for an increase in faith, they were saying "Jesus, we deposited our mustard seed size trust in you but right about now it does not feel enough."

Quick now, jump over to our time and place. Can you imagine our Search and Call team saying, "We don't know if we can do what you have commissioned us to do!"

What the apostles (and maybe our Search and Call team) didn't understand was what Paul preached years after Jesus died. All they (and we) have to do is hold on to the Jesus' sound if sometimes preposterous teachings. They (and we) are charged with guarding and trusting God's long standing promises that even predated the arrival of Jesus on the planet. Like that children's book about the little train that could, "we can do it" with the help of the Holy Spirit that is alive in ordinary people.

Did it seem absurd to you last spring when Lois and Clare talked about to increasing the involvement of our church in the CROPHUNGER walk? I thought the idea of increase was nonsensical because I knew that our church was going to be soon facing my retirement. That kind of upheaval often makes a church feel less, not more risk taking.

As the weeks went on after the announcement of my retirement, I saw Lois and Clare say, with persistent encouragement, something like this. "We are all feeling a bit or a lot uprooted. Rather than stay stuck in our familiar soil, can we think really large about our long standing CROP Hunger walks mission? Let's trust the One always went toward the hungry. Let's go with the Spirit and plant our roots in a Sea of Grace!"

That is what you did. Many of you are walking today and many of you donated to Church World Service. Many of you purchased quilt raffle tickets. None of us are expecting a big thanks for doing good deeds. We are trusting that the Red Wave of Hope will have a good

time together and a good time is good enough for Jesus. Remember the other preposterous thing he taught “Where two or more are gathered in my name, there I am.”

CROP Hunger walk is not the only place where your confidence is radiant. Who would have thought that in this time of transition another five of you come would forward to say that you know that I am retiring. You are sad about that but instead of running away from this church, you are choosing to become church members before I leave. Why wait? Plant yourselves in the sea now!

One of those people ready to become a church member was Verne Bissell. When Verne’s wife Gail died this year instead of sinking into an ocean of despair, he told me “I am going to need the church.” Turns out we needed Verne too. In the short time he was with us in this congregation he bestowed on us a great faith that life was for the living as long as you are alive so keep on giving of yourself as long as you can.

This week Verne suffered a major stroke and died last night. He was not able to join with us in the way he hoped he could. But Verne, however you might be feeling our heartbreak now, do not have doubts about this - you are still a part of us.

Let me close now with the words Paul, speaking to people of his time. It seems right to me to speak them to you.

“I am grateful to God – whom I worship with a clear conscience, as my ancestors did – when I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day...I am reminded of your sincere faith. For this reason I remind you to kindle the gift of God that is within you.”

Go forth wave of faith and hope. Go forth children and youth and adults. Go forth members and friends. Go forth because the gift of faith is kindling in you. Go forth rejoicing in the Holy Spirit’s power. Amen