

12.10.2023 Sermon

Just a Little More Faith | Matthew 17:14-20

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

faith, god, jesus, disciples, traditions, church, healed, life, mountain, people, secular, move, today, heart, experience, point, hope, bible, advent, religious

SPEAKERS

Rev. James Bady

Well, good morning. It's good to be with you. Good to be around you. I just want to get settled in here a little bit. For those visiting for the first few times, I want you to understand that we are a church that is a collection of things. We're not very formal, but we have formal people in our midst. We have a concept about serving God that we talk about as being center set. This means everything we do is focused exclusively on Jesus Christ and how he would move throughout the earth, even today.

In this concept, there is a mixture of traditions. We have people who come to this church from many different backgrounds, traditions, styles of worship, and thoughts about God. We think all of that is valid. All these denominations and traditions throughout history have sound foundations. Our goal, as we continue to focus on Jesus Christ, is to gather all that is good to get a more complete understanding of God.

I didn't focus on the things that are bad, because there's so much good in God. If you can do the things that are good in God, the rest will fall away. When I am busy doing good work, I don't have time for much else. Yesterday, we had some meetings here at the church. Anyone who knows me at home knows I am on a regimented eating schedule. But sometimes, when I'm busy, the less important things fall away.

Our goal is to focus on the important things, your relationship with God, and allow God to have a relationship with you that is exclusive to you. Then you can do what God has for you. That sounds like a fair exchange. Sometimes, you'll see us do things that may feel a little quirky due to some traditions, and other times we'll be very formal, where there are traditions around that too.

I want to read the week two Advent prayer. Advent means the coming of someone great, the celebration of someone great. We think Jesus was great. The prayer says, "Merciful God, who sent your messengers, the prophets, to preach repentance and prepare a way for our salvation. Give us grace to heed their warnings and forsake our sins, that we may greet with joy, the coming of Jesus Christ, our Redeemer, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God now and forever. Amen."

So, it's the second week of Advent. We are in a series in our church called "Choose Your Own Adventure". Each pastor, preacher, and elder talks about texts and topics that are on their heart. After the service, we have our gathering room where we have coffee, tea, and talk about church, the message, and just catch up.

Last week, Kevin talked about the Nativity scene, the different stories and perspectives. One from Joseph's perspective and another from Mary's. Both are necessary to understand what was going on. Another tenet of our church is diversity, as all perspectives joined together provide a more accurate picture of what is God.

Today, I turn to Matthew, chapter 17, verses 14 through 20, titled "Just a Little More Faith". It's a story where a man comes to Jesus, asking for mercy for his son who has seizures. The disciples couldn't heal him, but Jesus did. The disciples asked why they couldn't do it, and Jesus said it was because of their little faith. He told them that with faith the size of a mustard seed, they could move mountains.

This miracle story is sandwiched between two rebukes from Jesus, which might seem harsh, but there's a point in his ministry where he is confirmed as the Son of God. This happened in the mountain of transfiguration, where he met Moses and Elijah, and his face shone bright, and his clothes glowed. A voice confirmed, "This is My beloved Son."

And so, those disciples, Peter, James, and John, want to create a monument to Jesus in that mountain, and Jesus talks him out of it and says, 'Hey, that's not necessary. Let's go back down to the people.' And so, they get down to the people, and immediately this gentleman comes to Jesus and says, 'Hey, I've been looking for you. I have a son. And he's suffering, like a parent, he's looking for hope, he's looking for a solution. Instead, I took them to your disciples, but they didn't get it done. Right?' Jesus heals. And I am proud of the disciples at this point. Right? Because they didn't. They didn't fall, because they will reboot. They didn't shrink. They didn't drop away because their feelings were hurt.

And I mean, think, put yourself in that position. Jesus not only calls you unbelieving. Got it? Evidence. But why you got to call me perverse. What is that about? I'm sorry, I ask strange questions. To God. When I read the Bible, what is going on here? My feelings would be hurt.

What's your thoughts? Come on, be honest. Jesus called you a name, perverse. And they just like you know what, Jesus, I get it, I too, am disappointed that I couldn't do the miracles like you did the miracles. What can you tell me? What could I have done differently? Can you tell me what did I do wrong? And Jesus said, 'Well, it's because your faith is so small. It's not that you don't have any faith. It is your small because if it was even the size of a mustard seed, you could have gotten this done.' Could have gotten this done. So, it isn't impossible for you. You just need to grow a little bit. You need to go through some things first.

And unfortunately, Matthew, he just moves on to the next story. Because but if you're like me, you would have been saying, 'Well, what tell me how do I grow? How do I grow from where I am with this little faith that isn't even the size of a mustard seed to get to the things that I want to get done? How do I do it?' Mark 9:29 tries to help by saying some things only come out by prayer. Some things only change through experience, some faith only grow by being put in a difficult situation. Something something.

"And so that is the position that the disciples are in, I have a little faith, but I need a little bit more. I have some faith, but not enough faith. I have situations that are bigger than the capabilities that I have to resolve. That's where I am in life. And so that is the quandary that a lot of us find ourselves in you have a certain set of skills, but you just don't have enough for the moment.

And I hate to break it to some of you, but you know, you're in church. So, there's some church people around. And we talk about faith in a way that expects you to kind of know what all it is. Right? So, we call this experience, call life, our faith walk. And we call these places that we come to worship God, houses of faith. What is, how do you get more faith? What are we doing here? And then we are pointed to some scriptures like Hebrews 11:1 and said faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

Okay. What does that mean? All right. Thomas Aquinas tries to put us at ease. He's a theologian that says, unfortunately, my friends, those who have faith, they won't need an explanation. And those who do not, no explanation is possible. Don't go y'all are jacking me up here, fellas. Because there I hope he's wrong. Because I'm hoping there's a place where there's some people that are struggling with this thing called faith. It is because of your hurt. And it's not because you don't want it. It's not because it hasn't been tried. I hope there's space for discussion. I hope there's the opportunity I'm gonna make it through. Because it's so important to your life and success is so important to your existence and grow faith. Because faith, I think we all experienced it in at least two categories. Faith in the religious standpoint is this mystical, magical thing, where those things that we thought were impossible seem to happen. Right. Another theologian, Thomas Aquinas, like Thomas Aquinas, St. Augustine says that faith is believing truly what you don't see. And its reward is when you see what you want to

believe. I'm there. So, I have experienced faith. So, no definition is necessary. But I'm concerned about the people who are still believing, still needing, and have not yet received the reward. What do we do? How do we talk to you?

"In religious speak, we just put out the word, we just say you gotta have faith, we get loud, we shout. We are exuberant, because we're thinking about our rewards that we've already received. And we are lacking a sensitivity to those of you who have done everything we've done. But yet you haven't received that reward. This message is for you, and those that you know, that are like that. Because I would submit to you that you are probably closer to religious faith than you understand. Because the other side of religious faith is what we call secular faith and secular faith. If you experience it more like statistics, it's data. It is these probabilities of things that we do that it's not 100%. But there are certain characteristics and traditions that you do if you do them. There is a result. It doesn't happen every time. But it does follow a pattern.

You know that if you go to bed at a certain time and sleep for a certain number of hours, you are likely to wake up refreshed. You know, if you go to the doctor regularly and get checked up and do the things that the doctor asks you to do. You are likely to be healthier. You know that if you go to school, get a great education, and then follow this certain path, you're likely to get a better job and likely to make more money and likely to have a retirement. But not every time. But you still tell every young person to do what?

Go to school, get good grades, go to college, study discipline, get a job, settle down, and life will be wonderful. You all should hear the snickers in the room because it's not 100% guaranteed. There is a certain disappointment rate, a certain delay, and a certain disconnection in the patterns that we see in our reality. But why is that? We can accept the secular, but why can't we accept it in a religious round? Why is that? True, and this may be what Jesus is coming back to and why he's calling us. Not only unbelieving, but somewhat perverse. We can accept one, but we can't accept the other. We can move in one direction, but not in the other. Because here's the reality.

I submit to you, as we are in this society, where we have made so many great discoveries and breakthroughs, where we can learn different languages on an app, travel around the world, and search almost any topic on Google to expand our minds. But after you do all of that, you will come to a point where, no matter your knowledge or skill, it's not enough. And I submit to you, therein lies the moment where faith takes over. Faith is the pathway to take you from the life you're experiencing today to the life you are seeking. Faith is the roadway of how you go from where you are to where you need to be.

There are examples in the Bible that I think are lovely and poetic. In Hebrews 11, it talks about what our faith does for us and the breakthroughs it has for our life. It is through faith that we

believe that God, at God's command, created the world. It is through faith that we understand in order to please God, you have to have faith. It is through faith that Enoch, an individual, never tasted death. It is through faith that Abel gave an honor to God that surpassed his brother Cain's, ending up costing a human's life. It is through faith that there was this poor young man who goes to another nation, called Abraham, whom God said that through him, his children will number greater than the sands of the beaches. It is through faith that we do things that are illogical, that become real, that are unthinkable, yet they become reality.

It is through faith, that after your skills are done, and trust me, we at this church believe in all of medicine, psychology, sociology, all of the technical and social sciences. We believe in all of that. And I personally believe it is the move and influence of God that has placed the witty inventions in our minds, that produce the technology that you see. Right, but it is through faith. But when these people came through to these moments of where they needed a breakthrough, they turned to God. It is only through faith that the Wright brothers got on this thing that looked like a bike and dared to jump off the side of a cliff. That's faith. No, no, I wouldn't have been with the Wright Brothers – a little bit too much faith. But now we fly left, right, and center. It was faith that led to the first open-heart surgery. I mean, hold on, you're going to open up my chest, stop my heart. Let's just hold on with that thought right there. And then we started, you're going to do that to me. That patient had all kinds of faith. These are the things. This is the secular versus the spiritual.

And I think that we, there's no magic to it. But if we look at our society, we think that because we are getting smarter, we don't need faith. We think because we're becoming more sophisticated, there isn't a space for faith. Now, you're just opening up new frontiers of faith. Faith is always necessary, always present, always powerful. In our current society, we try to minimize and take away some of the power of the miracles that we see within the Bible. Right. So, for example, the crossing of the Red Sea, as an example, right? The knowledge that we now have about the Red Sea, in times of the year, the current will roll back, and that you can actually walk from one side to the other. It totally ignores that horses are then drowned by almost nothing. But we'll leave that part of the story aside. But I think those that are challenging that, from our knowledge and understanding of today, are missing the point of the story.

The point of the story is this: there was a mountain of an issue in front of the people. And God moved in. They are missing that at times, there are situations that are in front of us, that there is no other solution. And somehow, the world changes on our behalf. They are missing the issue, which is that there are times in our life, that there's nothing else left, but they're missing the issue that it isn't about the story in the Bible. It is about us in our stories that are revealed to us or compared to us. What is your issue? What is your need? The Anatomy of faith is just, do I have a need? Because there's a pathway from that need to where you want to go. There is a pathway. And will you be like the disciples? Yes, the first time through? Nothing. Maybe the

second time through? Nothing. And then some church people will criticize you. I just want to be honest. Will you have the courage to stay on the path of faith?

When you will be done with the representatives of Jesus? And go to Jesus say they couldn't do it. The hurt you could. I try and listen to them. That's our traditions. That's our churches. That's them. But now, God, will you do it? We've come a long way in our technology. We've done a lot of good. And I pray that now is the time that your needs are individually met. That you will have for you and your family. Your hearts healed. Your bodies healed. Your financial needs met. I want that for you individually. But I want us to join together collectively for the hearts of humanity, that we will care about others that are not like us. That we will learn how to be kind, that we will learn how to be caring, open, gentle, loving, and different because that is the experience I seek today. Things are perfect. The things in my life are good, I kind of go, why? I have great children. I'm in good health, so I am good. But now, now what? I want you healed. I want you whole. And I have extended and expressed all of my skills. And I can't get it done. It is only through our collective failure, there, that we have a chance.

I'll close with this. There is another author, Norman Peale, that says there are two primary forces that work in our world. It is fear and it is faith. Fear can move you to destruction, sickness, or failure, and only in rare instances will it motivate you to accomplishments. But faith is a greater force. Faith can drive you and can drive into yourself a consciousness that will set you free. I hope that you will be free this week. Amen.