

**Hinde Street Methodist Church**

Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> October 2019

10am Rev Peter Cornick

Luke 17: 5-10

**Increase our faith!**

John Wesley said: 'preach faith until you have it.' There are some preachers who preach because their certainty and conviction is so sure, they want to proclaim it. Others preach, and in their preaching, are searching for, developing, trying to comprehend faith. I am in the latter style of preacher! And every sermon is a new discovery into the scriptures, the words of Jesus or the prophets, and a journey to sustain a fragile faith.

The disciples want Jesus to increase their faith. If you've seen Jesus calling the sick to rise, the lame to walk, and 5000 fed from next to nothing, you too would think – if only I had his faith. And if you had been asked, as the disciples had been, to forgive one another seventy times, and one of those disciples was a Remainer or a Leaver – whichever you were not – you would think, if only I had more faith; if only I had the capacity to forgive, like Jesus, and treat that disciple like a human being and friend, I might just understand her position.

We always want more. And if we have more, we will want some more again. I suspect that we will never believe we have enough faith. Jesus' words are, that we need just the amount of faith we have been given, to believe in him – to preach; or to do our bit in healing the sick by that phone call or visit to the hospital; or to feed, not quite 5000, on a Wednesday. None of it seems very much. It is not spectacular; but it is enough. Mustard seed enough. And if we have faith of that size, the lives moved or touched by God through

our faith in Christ, will be changed to such an extent as if we had uprooted a tree and planted it in the deep ocean.

It is the gospel of small things; of believing that God gives what you need for the task; of healing, feeding, forgiving.

‘Increase our faith.’

‘If you had faith the size of a mustard seed’ ...

There is a second part to this reading; and it’s a difficult passage to hear. It’s difficult because to understand it, you have to put yourself in the mind of the slave owner. No-one here today, I hope, would want to own a slave. But for Luke’s listeners, Jesus’ listeners, owning a slave was normal. So, Jesus uses it as an example.

Who amongst you would own a slave and, once the slave has done his or her work, invite them to tea – preparing it yourself? You wouldn’t – it is the slave’s job to prepare the tea for you. Likewise, you don’t thank the slave – it is their job.

I told you it was rather difficult to hear. Not quite what we want Jesus to say. But, there it is.

So, what you do as a disciple, a follower, to serve God, is only what you ought to do.

Essentially, it says, get on with the task Christ has given you – it might be healing, feeding or forgiving. It’s what you do as a follower of Christ. No more; no less. It’s what you should be doing.

That may seem a little harsh, but perhaps it’s saying, if you’re waiting for thanks and congratulations, you’ve got the wrong motivation – although I do think a little thanks and recognition always goes a long way!

A parable about a mustard seed; and a parable about a slave. You have enough faith; do what you do to serve God.

But perhaps there is a warning, a theological alarm bell, which we might miss, hidden in these two seemingly unrelated passages. A theological point of huge importance to those of us engaged in any kind of Christian service. A corrective to any minister who boasts of 'preaching four times today – and I visited six people on the way' – believe me, they exist!

Is Jesus saying, do what you are called to do, to serve Christ; preach, heal, feed – whatever it is. But don't think that the *more* you do, the *more* you preach, heal, feed, the *more* you will increase your standing before God. The *more* you will increase your faith. You cannot earn and work your way to salvation through Christ; you cannot by your own effort, increase your faith.

For your faith is given to you by God, through Christ; and you have more than enough to uproot tress, if you have been given faith, the size of a mustard seed.