



'Together We Do More: Wrestling with Faith'

Lectionary 27 – Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost
8:30 & 10:45 am, October 2, 2016
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Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

[Psalm 37:1-9](#); [2 Timothy 1:1-14](#); [Luke 17:5-10](#)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

I remember exactly what it looked like: A small, white leather volume with a zipper around that closed it. My name imprinted on the front. Oh-so-thin-and-delicate paper on the inside, with a gold edge. That's what my first Bible looked like. I thought it was beautiful.

But there are other things about it I don't remember. Like who gave it to me. I think my mother gave it to me—or was it her mother, my Grandma Burglund? Whichever one it was, they gave the Bible to me as a gift. I also can't remember what happened to it. Haven't seen it in years. When my mom and I cleaned out her attic and basement 2 years ago, it wasn't there, but I think it hasn't been in either of our homes for a long, long time. My guess is that somewhere along the way, it was accidentally **thrown** away.

It's not like I don't have any Bibles around my home or office. I have plenty of them. But on this Bible Sunday, as I witnessed our 3rd graders being handed their Bibles from their parents, I admit being a little sad that I don't have that lovely little Bible any more.

Yet I also would have to say that perhaps that Bible is more symbolic of what was actually given to me by my mom and my Grandma. I may not have that particular Bible any more. But I have not forgotten how these two women shared their faith with me over the years, from the time I was very young down to these days. When I consider their faith, and how they bore witness to me and our family and our neighbors and friends...well, that's their gift that keeps on giving. Their living out their faith, and then sharing it with others I hold onto, and it encourages me to live out my faith likewise. I remember my Grandma Burglund as superintendent of and a teacher in her church's Sunday School. I remember her life as one of kindness, compassion, and self-giving—the imitation of her Lord. I remember my mom years ago helping with our youth group and creating large banners to decorate the worship space for each season of the church year. And I rejoice that Mom continues to live out her faith in these later years of her life—preparing and serving funeral meals, participating in Saturday work crews, attending Bible studies, worshipping regularly. I know my mom sets aside time every day for personal devotion—scripture reading and prayer. I also know both my mom and Grandma leaned on their Lord in the darkest times of their lives. Their leaning on God and trusting in his power at work in their lives—well, those stories are burned into my memory. Knowing these things about them is such a gift for me, and more than makes up for my lost little white Bible.

I think that's precisely where Paul is coming from, as he writes to his young friend and pastor Timothy. Remember I said last week that Paul was a mentor for Timothy, helping him be a faithful pastor of several early Christian congregations. But Paul wasn't the only mentor. Paul reminds Timothy that he need only look back to his mother Eunice and his grandmother Lois, and see how they bore witness to him. Mother and grandmother lived out their faith and then shared that faith with others, most particularly this son and grandson. Paul tells Timothy not to forget that gift given.

Basically, he tells Timothy that no matter how difficult or dire a situation he might find himself in, no matter if his congregation is filled with conflict, or his own heart filled with worry or doubt, he need only remember the generations of the faithful who walked on this earth before him. He need only rekindle the tiny flicker of faith that resides in him as God's precious gift through baptism. And when Timothy does these things, that little flicker of faith will grow into a steady flame. He'll find courage for a new day and sense God's continuing presence and power in his life. And Timothy will not be ashamed to share his faith to the next generation. The gift will go on.

That doesn't mean there won't be bumps along the way. For Timothy or you and me. Take the disciples in our gospel reading today. Jesus has been asking much from them in the days that precede this story. He has said things such as this:

You cannot serve God and wealth.

Forgive those who wrong you.

Give up your possessions.

Love your enemies.

Welcome the outcast and the lowly.

Take up your cross daily and follow me.

Is it any wonder then that these disciples, having heard these things from Jesus day in and day out, now plead with him, "Increase our faith!" Read between the lines, and we realize they're saying, "We don't have what we need to be faithful disciples. We need something else to be able to do these things. This is really hard, Jesus, and we aren't certain we can take up these tasks and follow you."

One would think Jesus might respond to their plea by agreeing with them: "Yep. You don't have what it takes. You lack what you need to follow me." After all, he has been witness both to their occasional cluelessness and their failures.

But that isn't how Jesus responds. Instead, he indicates there is already within them this gift of faith God has planted, however small at times it seems to be, and it is enough. It is sufficient. It is, to paraphrase what Paul said to Timothy, this little flickering flame they simply need to rekindle. Jesus encourages his disciples in much the same way that Paul encourages Timothy. "Do not be afraid. You've been given enough by God to see you through...**anything**. Lean into that little bit of faith. Trust God. And keep doing what you're doing."

Hmmm. So faith is not really a "quantitative commodity" where you need a specific large amount to accomplish anything. To quote one scholar I read this week, "Faith is the

openness to God's power." (Texts for Preaching by Cousar, Gaventa, McCann, and Newsome) To quote an old Brylcreem hair commercial, "A little dab'll do ya."

Jesus suggests that even that little dab of faith would be enough to move a mulberry bush. Of course, none of the disciples needed to move any mulberry bushes. But this little dab of faith was enough for them, and enough for our parents and our grandparents and all those generations who have gone before us. Enough to enable them to take up everyday tasks that spoke their faith loud and clear. Their stories remain their gift to us. Then we, too, in our generation, take up those same everyday tasks of kindness, compassion, service, and mercy. We, too, live out the story of Jesus Christ in our lives, and the generation that follows us hears that story and receives it as gift from us, all fresh and new. **AMEN.**

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