

Call to Worship      **Acts 15:7-15; 16:4-5**

After much debate, Peter stood and addressed them, "Fellow believers, you know that, early on, God chose me from among you as the one through whom those outside our church, would hear the word of the gospel and come to believe. **God, who knows people's deepest thoughts and desires, confirmed this by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as he did to us. He made no distinction between us and them, but purified their deepest thoughts and desires through faith.**

Why then are you now challenging God by placing a burden on the shoulders of these disciples that neither we nor our ancestors could bear? **On the contrary, we believe that we and they are saved in the same way, by the grace of the Lord Jesus."**

As Paul and his companions traveled through the cities, they instructed the believers...**So the churches were strengthened in the faith and every day their numbers flourished.**

Prayer of Invocation

**Holy Spirit, today as we open our lives to you, we pray that we will know you truly, recognizing peace and wisdom deep within our lives, and responding to your beginnings of good. Come, Holy Spirit. Be known to us this day, for we come to you in faith. Amen.**

The Word      **Matthew 17:14-20; 21:18-22**

When they came to the crowd, a man met Jesus. He knelt before him, saying, "Lord, show mercy to my son. **He is epileptic and suffers terribly, for he often falls into the fire or the water. I brought him to your disciples, but they couldn't heal him."**

Jesus answered, "You faithless and crooked generation, how long will I be with you? How long will I put up with you? Bring the boy here to me." **Then Jesus spoke harshly to the demon. And it came out of the child, who was healed from that time on.**

Then the disciples came to Jesus in private and said, "Why couldn't we throw the demon out?" **"Because you have little faith," he said. "I assure you that if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you could say to this mountain, 'Go from here to there,' and it will go. There will be nothing that you can't do."**

Early in the morning as Jesus was returning to the city, he was hungry. He saw a fig tree along the road, but when he came to it, he found nothing except leaves. Then he said to it, "You'll never again bear fruit!" The fig tree dried up at once. **When the disciples saw it, they were amazed. "How did the fig tree dry up so fast?" they asked.**

Living the Word

One of the signs that I used to have in my office stated this: "Faith is a journey, not a guilt trip." If you don't yet have enough faith to move a mountain, don't feel guilty. If you seek that faith, which Jesus said is possible, you may still be on the journey there...

Honestly, I have looked at that sign in my office hundreds of times, but it had been a while, so this week, since God chose the topic way last spring, it was time for me to 'move' on my faith journey. Often during the week as I mill over the scriptures, God sends me suggestions and reminders of where to go in the sermon...I'm not sure how it works, but I know it is a Holy Spirit thing.

So question one is 'how do you get faith?' You can pray for faith, yet it is more in the listening and observing of life as it happening... reflecting on your journey.

As a young pastor, John Wesley once asked his friend: How do I get faith...the friend's reply was "preach faith until you have it and then because you have it, you will preach faith." For those of you that think you aren't a preacher, though every time you tell someone your opinion, it is very close to preaching, I will re-word it for you:

Share what is in your heart and mind with people and then if you listen to what you have said, you may hear what you believe. That can become a compass as to where your faith level is.

Wesley's quadrilateral suggests that there are 4 ways to do that: First and foremost – go to the scriptures. Read the stories of the faith of others, when it was strong and when it was weak. This gives you a guideline to seek in your journey.

Next, what is the church's traditional beliefs about faith? People for hundreds of generations have debated and changed and refined the understandings of what God gave us in the scriptures and how faith played out in their lives. They are a great cloud of witnesses that continue to influence the church today.

Third have you experiencing faith so far in your life, and fourth in your processing where does the faith you have make sense to you, and seem reasonable? After you go through this process a few times you can actually see yourself growing in your faith.

On to question two: 'When do you know you have it?' Some of the indicators might be: an acceptance of the mystery of God – there will always be some things that we just don't have answers for, yet God knows and we can come to a place where we trust in our Creator enough to depend on God's love to keep us within the mystery.

You may also know that faith is there when you find yourself with an ability to mentor others who are weaker in their faith. Another way, is in experiencing a peace and calm in your spirit that lets you know that in the midst of the struggles, leaning on God instead of yourself is getting easier.

Jesus said "If you have faith, you will receive whatever you pray for?" Oh goody, goody! Wait! We may have to turn that around...You will receive whatever you pray for, when you have faith; enough faith to trust God with the answer that is best. "Lord, what you will, not what I want." Solutions come – but not often in our time or as our choice answer.

For instance how many of you have prayed for healing, of yourself or another and were disappointed with the results? Hopefully, no one told you that you just don't have enough faith – that is the guilt

trip. We need to remember that there are many kinds of healing: physical, emotional, spiritual; healing that may come through death and resurrection.

If you can pray for the answer that is needed (not the one that is wanted); if you can turn it over to God to decide – you are then using your faith in God - that all things are possible. When all things are surrendered to the Creator, the one who put it all together for us in the beginning, then we are free from the burden of guilt and worry as we wait for an answer.

“Faith brings the blessing of freedom!” “Faith is the bridge between where I am and where God is taking me.” “Faith is a journey not a guilt trip.” And God has promised to be with us on the journey, to send the Holy Spirit to help us, and presents us with the body of Christ – the church: the ones that we can rely on to carry us. That is what church can be – a place where you engage with others and want to share their burdens and blessings.

Many years ago, I had a friend in this church, named Sue Moeller, who was a spiritual sister. Along with Pastor Marilyn, we shared Bible study each week together. Sue and I, raising our sons together at church. When her mother died, I remember six church members gathered around Sue, close, almost like a group hug; and she said “I just don’t know how people that don’t have a church family and a faith in God get through these times.”

It is one of those moments that is burned into my visual memory and tattooed on my heart. Only few years later, Sue died suddenly, it was her faith in God that carried me through the pain of the loss of her.

*Faith, while trees are still in blossom, plans the picking of the fruit;  
faith can feel the thrill of harvest when the buds begin to sprout.*

*Long before the dawn is breaking, faith anticipates the sun.  
Faith is eager for the daylight, for the work that must be done.*

*Long before the rains were coming, Noah went & built an ark.  
Abraham, the lonely migrant, saw the light beyond the dark.*

*Faith, uplifted, tamed the water of the undivided sea,  
and the people of the Hebrews found the path that made them free.*

*Faith believes that God is faithful: God will be what God will be!  
Faith accepts the call, responding "I am willing Lord, send me."*

Our songs also tell the stories of our faith. In fact sometimes set to poetic form we can get the message in our brains long enough to wrap our minds around them.

This morning we will once again, share in the meal of remembrance of Christ. It is our faith that brings us to the table as we have realized that Jesus served the disciples and is serving us and we can believe in God’s forgiveness through Christ’s meal for us.

When we devote ourselves to walking with God each day through prayer and devotions, we find our faith in the midst of the journey. Jeremiah 17:7 says this – *"The person who trusts in the Lord will be blessed."*

This week one of my devotionals said this: Just prior to his crucifixion, [Jesus] told his disciples that he would leave them. *"Where I am going you cannot follow now, but you will follow later."* Peter asked, *"Lord, why can't I follow you now?"*

Jesus' reply is with the tenderness of a parent to a child: *"Don't be troubled. Trust in God. Trust also in me. My Father's house has room to spare. If that weren't the case, would I have told you that I'm going to prepare a place for you?"*

*"When I go to prepare a place for you, I will return and take you to be with me so that where I am you will be too."* When we walk in trust by our faith we leave worry behind as well as knowing that God has got us covered.

In a couple of minutes we are going to sing about walking by faith, I invite you to focus on the words as you continue your faith journey. We may not yet be ready to move mountains by our faith but faith is still a journey and not a guilt trip.

Paul wrote to the Philippians: *It's not that I have already reached this goal or have already been perfected, but I pursue it, so that I may grab hold of it because Christ grabbed hold of me for just this purpose.*

Paul goes on to write: *Brothers and sisters, I myself don't think I've reached it, but I do this one thing: I forget about the things behind me and reach out for the things ahead of me. The goal I pursue is the prize of God's upward call in Christ Jesus.*

How is your faith progressing? Is it time to begin again, moving forward in your faith journey?