

Who me? Are you pointing at me?

Exodus 3: 1-15; Luke 17: 5-10

The apostles said to God, ‘Increase our faith.’ To which Jesus had two responses. Oliver Larry Yarborough, a biblical scholar, helps to decode these seemingly strange responses. The first response is a saying of Jesus that is quite familiar to many of us where he says, ‘If you had faith the size of a mustard seed you could say to the mulberry tree be uprooted and planted in the sea and it would obey you.’ Now Luke uses this saying in a different way than Matthew does, this saying comes up in two of the Gospels. In Matthew, he is responding instead to the disciple’s questions about their inability to cast out demons; because of their ‘little faith’. Jesus is saying that all you need is a little bit of faith, as much as a tiny mustard seed and you can move mountains. Faith is needed for healing according to Matthew. Luke however chooses to use this saying to address the disciples request for faith. Many scholars have argued that there is no relationship between the first saying about the mustard seed and the second one in which Luke says, ‘who among you would say to your slave, who had just done all this work, come sit at my table.’, instead of the usual expectation of a slave where they would be expected to prepare you dinner. And then asked the question, do you thank the slave for doing what was commanded.¹

What comes before the scripture that we read today? In Luke, he was teaching the disciples about forgiveness. If another disciple sins, then they must seek repentance and if they seek repentance you must forgive. And even more than that, if the person does it seven times and repents you also need to forgive, at least seven times up to seventy-seven I think it is. The disciples ask Jesus to increase their faith because they need their faith in order to be able to forgive. Forgiveness is not an easy task. It takes a lot of patience, it takes a lot of personal work, but being a disciple of Jesus means that we do need to forgive and so part of our journey this year is about becoming the disciples that God would want us to be. It takes great strength. It takes humbleness and it takes commitment.

Another part of being a disciple is not letting our fear of inadequacy or our lack of ability stop us from participating and investing in what we believe. The reality is that what we believe in the United Church is that every single one of us is called by God. Every one of us is needed. God calls each of us even when and even though we feel unworthy. But being a faithful follower

¹ Oliver Larry Yarbrough, *Feasting on the Word* Year C Volume 4, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), p. 140.

means saying yes to God and trusting in God. We need to stop hiding behind our preconceived notions of what a disciple is, what a Christian is and what we need before we can participate in the kingdom of God.

I had a professor in university once share something with me that was puzzling him. He was a Jewish man and scholar. He wanted to know why Christians often qualify their Christianity with the following words, "Oh I am Christian, but I am not practicing." For him if you are Jewish, then you are Jewish, there is nothing about practicing or not, you just are. Being Jewish is based on your being, not just on your doing. We often base our Christianity on the things we do or don't do rather than by who we are at our core.

The story of Moses today invites us to explore what it means to truly be in covenant with God and what God requires of us. God simply requires us to be. But to be in this world in relationship with each other, working and struggling together to get through our differences. We are called by God to live out our faith in the whole world and at times we may be asked to do specific tasks to further the work of God and at times we are going to feel inadequate, unqualified and unworthy. We may at times feel like the disciples and ask God to increase our faith; maybe we feel we don't have enough faith to truly be a disciple of Jesus. When God called out to Moses from that burning bush, God not only had a specific task in mind for him, but God believed in Moses. Sometimes we need people to believe in us. In order for us to be faithful, sometimes we need others to name and identify what our gifts are in order for us to understand who we are and what we are called to be in this world.

As we enter this month of October, we will explore with one another what it takes to stop hiding. To break down those barriers. We will explore ways that we hide our faith from God, from each other and from ourselves. We are going to encourage one another to participate weekly in worship for this is one of the ways, along with prayer, that we can increase our faith. Worship helps us to express our gratitude; to praise God. We praise God for what God has done and who God is. Coming to worship helps us to remember that we are not alone. Worshipping together and sharing communion reminds us of the importance of reconciling our differences, seeking forgiveness, granting forgiveness, so that we can put those differences aside for the greater good.

The stewardship committee's question for you this month is how will you invest in our mission which states, 'trusting in the promise of Jesus that where two or three are gathered in my name I am there among them. We come together at Robertson-Wesley United Church to worship God, to share each others joys and sorrows and to learn and grow in faith and to use God's gifts wisely, and to lead active Christian lives of service among our neighbours here and in the global world.' How will you invest and be a part of this mission that we have named? How will you invest your time and how will you acknowledge that we are both broken and hopeful at the same time? How will we invest our time in deepening our relationship with God and our spiritual journey? How will we hold on to our tradition while reaching out to the edges of our society so that we can live the good news where we help the oppressed, clothe the hungry, speak out for

people who have no voice? And how will we share all that we have been blessed with to ensure the needs are taken care of in this community and in the world?

When that bush is on fire, it's on fire because we are investing in what God has called us to do. We all can identify with Moses. Who would want to be chosen to go to the Pharaoh and say, 'Hey, let the people go.' His slaves, the people that were doing all the work for him. Some of you may or may not know that Moses had a stutter; Moses hated speaking in front of people, and God said, 'It's okay. You are going to be just fine. I will give you somebody to help you.' We all get called to do things that we think are outside of our scope and God believes we can do it; and we do it with each other. I hope as you go through this week, when you cry out for God to increase your faith, know that the way we do this is together, through prayer, through worship and through living out our faith in this world and answering God's call. Amen.