

Lectionary reading for October 3, 2010

Luke 17:5-10

The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!" The Lord replied, "If you had the faith the size of a mustard seed, and you could say to this Mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea', and it would obey you.

"Who among you would say to your slave who has just come in from plowing or tending sheep in the field, 'come here at once and take your place at the table?' Would you not rather say to him, 'prepare supper for me, put on your apron and serve me while I eat and drink; later you may eat and drink?' Do you thank the slave for doing what was commanded? So you also, when you have done all that you were ordered to do, say, 'we are worthless slaves; we have done only what we ought to have done!'"

As humans, we are constantly struggling to overcome our limitations. Jesus is telling the apostles, that seeking more of what they think that they do not have is not the answer. They need to recognize what is already inside them and believe in it. How many of us feel that our success should come with the help of others? Do we first do our own work before asking others for help? Adversity can be a friend or foe. Jesus seems to be telling us along with the apostles that we need to take responsibility for our lives and commitments and not respond with a sense of entitlement.

The late Senator Ted Kennedy tells of the consequence of taking the "easy way out" in dealing with a Spanish exam. Ted's first priority was football and he worried that if he failed his Spanish exam his grades would prevent him from playing football. He was offered by a friend to take his final exam for him. Unfortunately, the other student was recognized by the exam proctor and Kennedy was given an "F" and told to do something with his life in the following year to prove that he could make better decisions. He entered the Army and learned more discipline along with having to do what he was told. (1) Is his story so different from that of the master who does not expect his servant to do all that he requests before seeking to meet his own needs?

Ted describes a situation in which he was sailing and the weather turned cold and raining. All night long he and his companion tried to sleep in the boat but could not due to being wet and cold. He did not want to finish the race due to the miserable night that he had just spent so after making his way to shore, he found a phone. He got the driver to pick him up and bring him home. When his father realized that he had not completed the race and brought the boat home, Ted was taken back to the boat and forced to complete the race and return the boat safely back to its home mooring. Again, it appears that Ted's father like Jesus in the parable was trying to remind his son that he had to act in a responsible manner as was expected. (2) Ted was essentially commanded to follow through on his job or commitment just as the servant was expected to do.

How do we grow from immaturity and seeking what pleases us to more mature faith tested on the battlefields of life? Again looking at Ted Kennedy's life, one is able to see a boy and eventually a man who finally takes responsibility for his actions after suffering through Chappaquiddick Island and the pain that it caused his father along with the victim's family and started to rely more on God than himself or others to save him. His faith was tested with the cancer that struck his son and the task that all parents fear that his son's leg would need to be amputated. Through his faith, Ted Kennedy worked with his son to allow him to live a normal life including skiing and sailing. Often, in crisis, we finally begin to have the faith of a mustard seed that things can work out if we give control to God and not try to justify our position. (3)

Working with children, it never ceases to amaze me how strong their belief in God can be despite having experienced trauma at the hands of others (peers, adults or even parents). They want to believe and given the opportunity through play to work through their trauma, can feeling the healing of God's grace.

Luke seems to be trying to remind us to believe and trust in God regardless of expectations imposed by the world and society. It is so easy to want to be seen as good and to justify or excuse our lack of faith based on worldly norms. Jesus was pointing out to his followers that faith does not have to be large but rather relied on and believed in to produce “larger than life” results. Praying often (and not just in crisis) along with giving thanks for all the small gifts that we receive helps us to grow in spirit and to trust God to walk with us no matter where we find ourselves. No situation is totally hopeless if we believe. The outcome may not be what we want but God is there in our situation and can provide peace and courage. May today’s Scripture reading speak to our hearts and help us with our limited belief.

1. Edward M. Kennedy, *True Compass* (New York: Twelve Hachette Book Group,2009),95-97
2. Edward M. Kennedy, *True Compass* (New York: Twelve Hachette Book Group,2009),290-293
3. Edward M. Kennedy, *True Compass* (New York: Twelve Hachette Book Group, 2009), 307-310

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