

Habakkuk 1.1-13, 2.1-4; Psalm 37.1-18; 2 Timothy 1.1-14; and Luke 17.5-10

There is a LOT going on in the readings today. Today is one of those Sundays when the readings seem too much to grasp as a whole. But there are clear voices among these disparate texts. These voices unite to create a harmony that sings of faith and discipleship. God promises that with genuine faith, we can do amazing things. **The promise is pretty explicit: God promises that with just the tiniest amount of faith – faith the size of a mustard seed - we can do absurdly amazing things.** For these next minutes, let yourself imagine the wide open possibilities that are presented in this promise. To begin, I will go back to last Sunday.

Last week, Redeemer celebrated the Millennium Development Goals as adopted by the United Nations and embraced by the Episcopal Church. The eight goals have the purpose of significantly reducing extreme poverty by the year 2015. After listening to the Adult Forum last week and Susan's sermon, what is apparent is that extreme poverty is not the only issue at the heart of this effort but that the Millennium Development Goals are also about eliminating extreme injustice. We heard about injustice in today's Old Testament reading.

In the reading from **Habakkuk**, we hear a prophet of the 7<sup>th</sup> century before Christ who is lamenting the injustice of his society and perceives the persecution by foreign nations as God's judgment. The language in Habakkuk could describe the world today: violence, trouble, destruction, strife, contention, injustice . . . and silence.

Habakkuk could be writing about Darfur, or Burma, or Iraq, or Jena, Louisiana, or northeast DC.

Habakkuk prophesies . . . And God answers:

“Write the vision; make it plain on tablets... For there is still a vision for the appointed time . . . If it seems to tarry, wait for it; it will surely come, it will not delay.”

God promises that there is a vision. Those with faith will look for the vision. Those with faith will make the vision come to pass. God will write a vision and it will be amazing.

There is a vision for our time: the Millennium Development Goals. How do you feel about those goals? What did you think after last week? Is it realistic to believe that we can eradicate

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extreme poverty? Are the eight goals realistic? They certainly seem daunting – overwhelming. Can they *really* be accomplished? Remember to imagine the wide open possibilities.

God has promised that with the faith of a mustard seed – just this much - we can command a tree to throw itself into the sea. Absurd? Apparently not. Do we think the reality of reaching the MDG's is absurd? Are we wide open to the possibilities presented in the challenge of becoming a ONE Congregation?

**Do we have the kind of faith that can change the world?!?**

**How *do* we understand our faith in God?**

In the Gospel of **Luke** today, in three short sentences, Jesus challenges the disciples' understanding of their faith:

The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!"

Jesus answers: "If you had faith the size of a mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it would obey you."

You know this metaphor. The mustard seed is tiny; the full grown mustard plant is enormous. The mustard seed story juxtaposes what is small next to what is great. The mustard seed story seems absurd to us. Because who really believes that he or she could command a tree to be uprooted and planted in the sea?! I mean really, how absurd. Or is it? . . .

We can eliminate the world's extreme poverty within eight years. We can change the world with our faith. Jesus does not think this is absurd.

**The point here** is not about having enough faith – but **is that we have faith at all**. And point is not about what **we** can do with our faith. The point is about what **GOD** can do with our faith. If we only have a little – this mustard-seed-much – God promises to do amazing things.

**Do we believe that God can do amazing things with our tiny – but real faith?**

Can we imagine changing the world?!

Jesus has more to say...

Because after promising that God can do great things with little faith, Jesus launches into a terse parable about **discipleship**. The Gospel of Luke continues:

“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 rather not 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!’”

Wow, “worthless slaves.” I don’t want to be considered a worthless slave... But very much of life entails doing the things that we ought to do and are expected to do. Discipleship is about doing God’s work with our faith. Discipleship is about more than doing what we ought to have done. Discipleship is very much like being a student in elementary school...

Back to School night was interesting this year at our sons’ elementary school. Both of their teachers made it very clear that if the students do exactly what’s asked for, they will earn a “C.” If they put a little more effort into a project, they might earn a “B.” And if they go above and beyond and really show effort and imagination, they will earn an “A.”

In a world of grade inflation, instant rewards, and a pervasive sense of entitlement, it’s quite an amazing thing to be faced with the prospect that doing average work will earn an average grade.

Are we average Disciples? Do we simply do the minimum? Would we earn a “C” for simply showing up on Sunday? To attend church regularly on Sundays might seem to us almost “counter cultural.” But I’m pretty sure that Jesus would say, “So what? I don’t care what the culture says. You’re only doing what I expect you to do.”

**Are we are only doing what we ought to do?** Or are we living into our faith?

Jesus is saying to us:

“You have this faith that can do amazing things. **And you have to *DO something with your faith***. Be the disciples that you are. Go out into the world with your faith. Feed the hungry. Care for women and children. Provide education. Eliminate extreme poverty. Strive for justice. Change the world.”

Jesus promises that even with our small faith, God can accomplish great things. But the point is that we have to do something with our faith. Just doing the minimum is not enough. Our faith – our discipleship – entails much more than the minimum. To be genuine disciples, we must act on our faith.

So... What does this call to discipleship mean for us? How do we relate this command to be disciples to the demands of meeting the Millennium Development Goals? How can we be better disciples in this Diocese? In the community of Bethesda? In this parish?

The possibilities are wide open. And especially today, the future is wide open.

In five days, the people of the Diocese of Nevada will elect their next bishop. When we gather next Sunday, we will know – one way or another – what one piece of the future of Redeemer looks like. When Susan came back visiting Nevada along with the other candidates, she said that she had gained a sense of the “wide open” space of Nevada and that she was “wide open” to God.

Can we, too, be wide open to God? Regardless of the outcome of the election, this community is changed. The way we perceive our Rector has changed. The way Susan sees herself has changed. The future ahead of this parish is wide open. **What can you imagine?** What does an “A+” parish look like? Can you imagine God doing absurdly amazing things through your faith? Would it be an amazing thing for Susan Burns to be elected the next Bishop of Nevada?! Not for God!

I have not been here long, but I know that there is genuine faith here at Redeemer. My growing sense is that Redeemer is on the cusp of newness, on the cusp of a new phase of parish life. In the context of a wide open future, what can you imagine? In the context of working to meet the Millennium Development Goals, can you imagine Redeemer changing the world? How are each of us wide open to the possibilities of God? The possibilities are exciting. And, yes they can seem daunting and uncertain.

God does not promise that being genuine disciples will be easy or simple or clear-cut. But God DOES promise to give us the faith we need.

In these coming days, remember today's **collect** that says that God is always ready to hear our prayers and to give more than we either desire or deserve.

In these coming days, remember that the **Psalm** says: "Commit your way to the Lord and put your trust in him." And the letter to **Timothy** encourages us to remember the One in whom we have put our trust.

In these coming days, remember to be wide open to God's possibilities. Do not fret as you wait for the election on Friday. God has a vision for Redeemer.

And in these coming days, remember that God promises that with just this much faith – mustard seed faith – we can do absurdly amazing things.

*Amen.*