

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

More is better! We want more; we need more...just in case...just in case something happens we'll need a littler more.

If we can simply have more it will make things much better or at least it will help. If I had just a little more money it would help ease the financial tension. If I had just a little more time in the day, I could get more done. If I had just a little more knowledge the results would be endless, even risky...at least that's what I have been told many times, Mark, if you had a brain, you'd be dangerous. The reality of "just a little more" is that more money means more spending and more financial tension, more time means more time to waste or more stuff to do. I have to say, I have been around some really bright folks in my day and they can be as bright as a box of rocks at times. And I will say to my dying day, the brightest man I was ever around could not read or write even his own name.

So, would more faith really help us? Better yet, do we even understand the faith we are seeking more of? For me, this request today of the apostles for more faith is like getting an extremely gracious gift and then after getting it, saying, thank you may I have another or more gifts? Do we fully understand the pure gift of faith we have been given? Saint Paul writes this to the church in Corinth:

⁶ For it is the God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness', who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

⁷ But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us. (2 Cor 4:6-7)

Likewise, we know this very thing from our Small Catechism that...

I believe that by my own understanding or strength I cannot believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him, *but instead* the Holy Spirit has called me through the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, made me holy and kept me in the true faith,¹

God has poured this gift of faith into our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of this gift from God...faith...faith in the promise revealed in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. But at times, like the apostles today in our Gospel, we too find ourselves saying to the Lord, "Increase our faith!"

If we think about this, it's like asking, make me more pregnant. I don't know of a woman who would be asking something like this...either you are or you aren't pregnant...more is not an option nor does "more" make the pregnancy better or obvious. By the same token, either you have faith or you don't...and more is not going to make it better or obvious.

I believe this is what Jesus is saying in an overstated way to the apostles and to us today in this Gospel lesson when he says:

⁶ ... "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. (Luke 17:6)

¹ Kolb, Robert ; Wengert, Timothy J. ; Arand, Charles P.: *The Book of Concord : The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000. *Small Catechism*, "The Creed: Third Article: On Being Made Holy." Page 355-356 par 6.

There are some things going on here that are missing from our Gospel lesson that might help clear up the request of more faith from the apostles. While it may reveal the reason for asking for more, it doesn't mean it is going to make the request appropriate.

First off, this question, increase our faith, comes on the heels of the first four verses of the 17th chapter of this Gospel. In those first four verses, Jesus is warning the disciples about getting in the way of someone else's faith. Should that happen, warns Jesus, it would be better if a millstone would be tied around one's neck and that they were thrown into the sea. Jesus also goes on to say in these few verses that we must forgive no matter how many times we are sinned against. And of course, the disciples react by saying, well, if that's the case we're gonna need some more faith here Jesus!

Likewise, when we are confronted or challenged, we cry out...WHY God! Or after the initial shock, we too seek more faith to carry us through. But do we fully understand what we are asking for? No...I don't believe we do because our faith has already enabled us to ask for more faith. So, what are we really asking? Or, do we even fully understand *what* we are asking for? Do we even understand what faith is? We ask for more faith usually when things do not go our way, or when something terrible happens. Is faith really what we want in these situations?

Increase my faith is really just asking for more power...more power or more control over the situation. We've read our Bibles, we have heard the stories of Jesus healing the sick, restoring sight to the blind, enabling the lame to walk, and restoring life to the dead...we have heard stories of Jesus besting the Pharisees, the high priests, the scribes, and all those who try to make him look foolish. Jesus refutes them, he bests them, and in the end, he makes his challengers to look like fools. When we ask for more faith, we want the ability to have that *POWER*...power we call *faith*...to do what Jesus does, especially when we are devastated with death, with tragedy, with confusion, and disillusionment...we cry out for more faith, we pray, Oh Lord give me faith or give me more faith.

I think what we are really asking is give me power over this situation that I have no control or power over, increase my power to control an outcome that will please me. But understand too, that when we seek "more" faith it is simply a reaction to the situation that we have no control over...it is like asking "why" when something happens that we cannot understand. "Why" is not a question, it is a statement or a word we say when we cannot put our devastation into words. So, do we seek "more" faith when things are going our way?

Do we even think of faith when things go well? So, what are we really saying when we want to increase our faith? What we are really saying, when we ask for more faith is that we don't understand the faith we already have. God does not act because we have done something or we have acted appropriately, our faith is what it is because God has done something, God has acted in giving faith to us as a gift. God does not owe us for living a good life! Nor are we praised for doing what we as Christians are called to do. God has already given His Son for us...how can God increase that? Sadly, we think somehow that more faith will enable us to best even Christ on the cross.

Our faith is not something that needs to increase, it simply needs to exist. God's favor and blessing are matters of grace...grace that cannot be earned. Sadly in our lack of understanding faith, we base our faith on our works and false and unfounded answers about faith so we can deal with challenges when they arise...we like to think we can make all the right moves and be in the know about faith. This however, is called power over situations and others. By having more, we assume we will have a better relationship with God...and therefore get what we want.

But God's grace given through faith is not something that can increase nor can it be earned...nor is mine better than yours or theirs. When we assume we can deal with God on the basis of what God owes us, we have made a big mistake, because we have rejected God's grace as the basis of our relationship to God and we have based that relationship on our own worth and merit.²

I'll say it again if I haven't made it clear, God's grace given through our faith...big or small...is a free gift...and more doesn't make it better. Faith the size of a speck is all that we need. Faith is not having all the right answers, faith is not given as a show for us, nor is it power, faith is responding by understanding God's grace given freely in love and then reflecting that grace we have been given or recognizing that grace in the best of times and the worst of times.

We don't need more faith we need to better understand that faith already given that enables God to work in our lives in ways that defy our understanding. Today in this Gospel lesson we find the apostles asking Jesus...just like we might ask Jesus when we are challenged, to increase our faith. When we like the apostles ask Jesus to increase our faith, we are admitting a complete lack of faith instead of trusting the faith already given.

The challenge is not that we need more faith, rather the challenge is to act on the faith already given as we have seen throughout Holy Scriptures. We hear of the woman who anointed Jesus' feet, the woman who simply touched Jesus and was healed, and the BLIND man who recognized Jesus, they all show us faith when it appears to be non-existent in people we would judge as unworthy.

Because we are confused when confronted with challenge, confronted with something that shakes us to the core, our faith is there, the challenges will never destroy our faith nor will they dissolve the relationship God has with us in Christ as St. Paul reassured the church in Rome when he reminded them that nothing will separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

Faith is given to us through the Holy Spirit, and is shown how it works for us in the death and resurrection of our Savior Jesus Christ. God's relationship with us is not based on what we do for God rather what God has done for us. God has given His love, and makes His promise known to us through Jesus Christ, who abolishes death and brings life and immortality to light through the Good News found in the relationship God has with each one of us through Christ Jesus...what more do we need to make this any better.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

² Keck, Leander, senior editor. *NIB, The New Interpreter's Bible, A Commentary in Twelve Volumes. Volume IX. The Gospel of Luke and the Gospel of John.* Nashville: Abington Press, 1995. Pages 323-324. From the reflections section on the appointed Gospel text for this day.