

“Faith”

October 5, 2025

First Christian Church

Scripture Text: Luke 17:5-6, Habakkuk 1:1-4, 2:2-4, 3:17-18

In our first Scripture reading, the disciples ask Jesus for more faith. Jesus has been putting forth some pretty radical expectations in the realms of forgiveness and using money to make people instead of using people to make money – expectations in direct conflict with cultural norms. They said they needed more faith to go that far. Well, what is faith? In Luke, Jesus says, “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.” Some of us are more familiar with Matthew’s version that says if you had faith the size of a mustard seed, you could say to this mountain “move from here to there” and it would move. Whether you are asking a mulberry tree to transplant itself from the earth to the sea or asking a mountain to move, both seem pretty impossible. So what is this faith that does impossible things?

There are 2 parts to faith. It begins with an unshakable belief, an intellectual assent, an affirmation of knowledge. In this case, that God exists. Not only that God exists, but that God has a plan for creation and is active in it. Some people come to affirm this truth intuitively. They may have been raised in a Christian home and taught the Bible from their earliest remembrance. They have seen God work in the lives of other people, and they simply know it is true. Others come to this affirmation after a thorough examination of the evidence. They look at the Scriptures, look at our world – the people and the system, they see the transforming power of hope and love, they see there is more happening than can be explained; and they believe. Whether the decision to believe in the God of the Bible is intuitive or comes through examination, that unshakeable belief is the first part of faith.

But let’s not gloss over that first part too quickly. It is not easy. Webster's New World College Dictionary begins to define faith as “unquestioning belief that does not require proof or evidence.” Just scouring the evidence is not necessarily going to get us to faith. There is tons of evidence that points to the God of the Bible, but there are holes. Belief still needs a leap of faith. When you take the leap and believe, everything works. But you can’t get there by evidence alone. Hebrews 11 defines faith as “the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” It is the leap of faith that allows us to see the “things not seen.” And what helps in that leap of faith is putting yourself right where you now are. Romans 10 says it is by hearing the Word proclaimed that one can come to faith. That is why preaching has such a central part in Protestant worship. The spoken Word of God has the power to build faith. Because the Word of God reveals who God is, and your understanding of God’s character and God’s plan, it defines every part of faith that comes after. Now that is frightening because we cannot comprehend the fullness of God. God is just too big. But God fills in the gaps of our

knowledge. Belief is not just something we do. God is at work also. Faith is a spiritual gift that comes from God.

Believing God exists and understanding God's character is where faith begins. And starting in the first book of the Bible when Abraham believed God's promise despite the total lack of evidence and God credited it to him as righteousness, faith has been what makes us worthy of God. But there is a 2nd part to faith. Just affirming that God exists is not enough. James 2 says the demons have that knowledge. They know God exists and know that Jesus is God's Son, but they certainly are not Jesus followers on their way to heaven. Faith includes more than knowledge. It takes movement. It takes trust. It takes planting your feet, or even you seat, in what you know. I love the old story of the tight rope walker who was strutting his stuff over a river. He walked the rope one way, then the other. He walked it forward, then walked it backward. He even grabbed a wheelbarrow and walked it across the narrow rope – first empty and then full of bricks. As some of the spectators began to get restless, he came out into the crowd and asked a man, "Do you believe I can walk this wheelbarrow across that rope?" The man responded, "I have seen you do. So yes, I believe you can." "Then get in the wheelbarrow." If the man gets in, he has faith. If not, he just has knowledge, and knowledge alone won't get you to the other side – physically or Spiritually.

Now this differentiation has not always been. The Gospel of John was written so that "you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name" (John 20:31). Yet John never uses the word faith. Not once. The fullness of faith is thoroughly woven into John, but John stuck with the world "believe" because he could not conceive of someone knowing the Good News and not having it change them. For John, belief included trust and action. The same was true of Paul. When Paul talks about being saved by faith and not works, he couldn't image someone believing the Good News of Jesus Christ and it not change their life. But others could. The same people who make it necessary for drug manufacturers to say, "do not take this medication if you are allergic to it," they are the same ones that made James clarify that faith without works is dead. James 2 says, "Just as the body is dead without breath, so also faith is dead without good works." Good works are proof that our faith is alive.

Our Old Testament reading gives us a picture of faith. It comes from the minor prophet Habakkuk. There are 12 minor prophets in the Old Testament, and they are called minor not because they are written for people under 18 years old, or have little importance, but because they are short. And no, I do not know how to pronounce the prophet's name correctly. I went online for help and the first 3 sites gave me 3 different pronunciations. I'll probably flip back and forth between Haba'cook and Ha-back'uk.

Anyway, back to his picture of faith. Habakkuk was dismayed because things in his time were not how they should be. Chapter 1 begins with the prophet crying out to God in anguish, “How long must we cry out to You, God, before you do something. Violence, wrongdoing, destruction, and anger are everywhere. Even the courts are perverted with lies and unrighteousness. The wicked are winning!” So God responds, “No problem. I will send the Babylonians. They will conquer you and establish their own definition of justice.” Chapter 2 begins with the prophet’s response saying, “That was not what I had in mind, God. That works for You, because You are eternal, but down here we are just mortals and will not live to see Your justice once the Babylonians are through. You got a different plan?” God says, “I do have a plan, and it is up to you to make it known.” From chapter 2, verses 3 and 4, “There is still a vision for the appointed time; it speaks of the end and does not lie. If it seems to tarry, wait for it... the righteous live by their faithfulness.” This waiting is not a passive waiting. It is active resistance. It is living God’s vision even when nobody else is. It is living God’s vision even when it doesn’t seem to be rewarded. It is living God’s vision even when all seems lost and hopeless. Faith is affirming God and God’s ways, trusting them and doing them, even if evidence says there is no reason to. Habakkuk’s third and final chapter ends with that picture of faith.

“Though the fig tree does not blossom
and no fruit is on the vines;
though the produce of the olive fails
and the fields yield no food;
though the flock is cut off from the fold
and there is no herd in the stalls,
yet I will rejoice in the Lord;
I will exult in the God of my salvation.”

There is nothing easy about praising God when you are hungry. There is nothing easy about following God’s ways when nobody else is and hope is nowhere to be seen. There is nothing easy about putting on the eyes of faith and intentionally seeing your surroundings different than all the voices that surround you. That is why the disciples asked Jesus to increase their faith. I like that prayer, but it scares me a little bit. I would like more faith when it comes to the belief part. I stand with the father in Mark 9 whose son suffered from seizures and Jesus asked, do you believe, and he said, “I believe, help my unbelief!” I want more belief, less doubt, more understanding, less fear, more confidence, more assurance, even more of the peace that passes understanding. But with that understanding, confidence, assurance, and peace comes the other side of faith – the trusting action. Trusting action that keeps stepping farther away from the truths and values of this world and into what matters most to God. That part of faith is going to change me. Change how I do life. Change what I value. Change my priorities. Change how I talk, how I use my time, how I spend my money. Like we said last week, Jesus treasures nothing that this world treasures, and God raised Him from the dead. That might be telling us

something about what we treasure. Over and over again, Scripture talks about forgiveness and caring for the most vulnerable in our midst.

Maybe that is the impossible thing? Jesus says with faith the size of a mustard seed you can do the impossible – tell the mountain to move and transplant the mulberry bush to the sea. Maybe the impossible that faith makes possible is living in this world but not being of this world. It is using the world's treasures for heavenly work. It is letting God define right and wrong as opposed to right and wrong being defined by if I get caught. It is personal purity with radical inclusivity.

“Though the fig tree does not blossom
and no fruit is on the vines;
though the produce of the olive fails
and the fields yield no food...
yet I will rejoice in the Lord;
I will exult in the God of my salvation.”

The miracle of faith is that it cherishes what Jesus cherishes, it holds fast without the world's evidence or support, it makes us more like Jesus, and thereby worthy of God's eternity.

Mike Van Heyningen