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THE NEW SHOFAR

the point of Jesus' metaphor is not the quantity of the faith we need, as much as is affirming its power.

Jesus has clear expectations for those who seek to follow him

I would guess that most of us have been in the situation in which these disciples have found themselves: Lord, I need more faith if I am going to be victorious in the face of what is facing me. I need that faith to expand my hope so that I can move forward with confidence.

Jesus has been setting down some of his expectations for his disciples. Would be followers have been reminded how the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head. If they want to follow they need to sort our family matters so that nothing distracts them. The Kingdom of God must take priority over these concerns. They are not to falter and not to turn back. Disciples must take up their cross and then come after him. They must go sell all they have. And there are even more demanding expectations spelt out for us in the parables. No wonder, at this point in the Gospel, they are saying: Lord, if we are to live all of this, we are going to need more hope than we have at the moment.

The response of Jesus is worth pondering as the Greek text suggests it is *with a twinge of irritation* that he tells them the faith they have at the moment is more than adequate for the ministry of discipleship they have been given. They only need a miniscule level of faith and they can uproot trees and throw them into the sea!

Faith in Jesus brings blessings to those who turn to him as slaves

This has been a consistent element of Luke's teaching. The most unlikely of people, saints, sinners and pagans have been blessed through their mustard-seed-like-faith. The woman possessed by demons anointed his feet with oil and kisses them. Jesus forgives her sins declaring *your faith has saved you* (7:50). She is not the only sinner to hear these words...

- The blind beggar who wants to see again (18:42).
- The Samaritan leper who comes back to thank Jesus for the healing (17:19).
- The woman with a haemorrhage who touches Jesus and is healed (3:48).
- The Roman Centurion about whom Jesus declares *Not even in Israel have I found such faith* (7:9).

Now Luke compares the faith response of these social and religious outcasts with that of the Apostles. Their faith seems to be missing, or at least their understanding of what the little faith they do have can achieve in their lives and their ministry.

- When they were in a boat and a storm came in Jesus asked of them why they were panicking? *Where is your faith?* (8:25).
- Knowing that Peter was going to deny him in his time of need, Jesus prays that his faith will not let him down (22:32).

What is this faith about which Jesus is speaking?

Before we answer that question, let us first be sure what faith here is not about. It is not the faith we express in our creeds, a collection of “external” statements of authority that shape the way we live.

When Jesus declares *your faith has saved you* to those people who turn to him in their need he speaks of **faith** as being something that enriches the entirety of our lives and our identity in the world. By the richness of divine grace, this transformative grace we receive in faith, enables us to see the world through “new” eyes and with ears attuned to “hearing” God speaking to us in the events and encounters of life. Faith of this kind draws into itself the fullness of our identity.

*What seems
“impossible”
for us is
“possible” for
God*

God calls us his slaves and not his servants!

What Jesus says about “faith” sets the stage for what he says about being God’s “slaves.” Here Jesus points out that a farmer simply expects a slave to “prepare supper ... and serve me while I eat and drink” (17:7-9). Thus, Simeon described himself as God’s “slave” when he gave the baby Jesus a blessing (2:29). Likewise, Jesus admonishes us to be watchful “slaves,” who are not only responsible in using what we have been entrusted (12:35-48), but also prudent in generating as much as we can with what we have been given (19:11-27).

If having “faith” — even faith the size of a mustard seed — means having one’s thoughts, feelings, and actions wholly transformed by God’s reign in our midst, then it entails being a “slave” of God: one wholly devoted to the fullness of God’s purposes in the world.

Being God’s slave means to come before God with no negotiating rights

Since God’s life is immeasurable, its generosity eludes any of our attempts to manipulate it — either as a power we can control or as a means for justifying or rewarding ourselves. This is why we are “worthless slaves”: those to whom nothing is owed (17:10). We serve in the banquet of God’s kingdom simply because of who we are, or more importantly, because of the One to whom we belong.

The disciple’s request is an understandable and well-intended request, especially when we consider what Jesus has just told them: *If the same person sins against you seven times a day, and turns back to you seven times and says, ‘I repent,’ you must forgive* (17:4). Try that without firstly being transformed by faith! What Jesus asks of us as disciples is far too demanding, impossible to achieve unless we allow Christ to move in, walk along side of us as we carry our cross and walk after him.