

October 6, 2013
2 Timothy 1:1-14
Luke 17:5-10

Cholesterol, Baseball playoffs and the Quest for more faith

I think most of us have seen the commercial. A man in a business suit is sitting on the floor with a group of kids. He asks them a question, “Who thinks more is better than less?” A little girl in a dress and white sweater raises her hand, eagerly. She says, “More is better than less because if there's more less stuff, then you might want to have some more. But then, your parents just won't let you because there's only a little. If you really like something, you'll want more of it. We want more. We want more. Like, you really like it, you want more.” “I follow you,” says the man in the suit, nodding calmly.

We want more. We want more. We get what she's saying.. We know what she means. We don't want less. We want more. If there is more less stuff and we really like it, that's not so good. We want more. More is more. More is better than less.

Everyone knows that more is more. And thankfully ‘more’ is always on offer in the world around us. More speed. More absorbency. More stain-fighting power. More ways to have your morning coffee. More channels

to watch on TV. More shoe styles, more cheese selections, more ways to remodel your home and customize your car. More access to digital media in more places. More. More. More. Our culture is addicted to more. And it's what we've come to expect and believe in. More is more. We want more. We want more. And OK, so we know there are times when more isn't always more. It isn't always good for us. More isn't always better. More is what gets you on a reality show about hoarding. More lands you in the hospital with five blocked arteries and enough cholesterol in your blood to kill a herd of buffalo. More leaves you with so much credit card debit that your great grandchildren will be paying it off. We know. We know. More is not always more. More can be more trouble than it's worth. But what about when it comes to faith? Wouldn't we all like a little bit more? More trust, more belief, more confidence in the power of God? Surely, having more faith would be a good thing. Increase our faith. That's what the disciples are asking Jesus today. Give us more, Lord. Help us believe, Lord. Help us trust. Let us say with full-throated trust, Your Kingdom come, Lord. Your will be done. Our lives

are in your hands. And let us really mean it. Increase our faith, Lord! We want more.

We need more. In case you haven't noticed, Jesus, it's not easy to have faith. It's not easy to follow you. You should know. You should know what it's like to be a human being trying to live a life of faith. Trying to be faithful to God. Faithful to God's way. Trusting in God's promise that in spite of all the evil in the world, God is still in control. That the light shines in the darkness. That love and mercy are going to triumph in the end. When everything now points to the fact that love and mercy mean nothing. And faith doesn't mean a hill of beans. And that your way, Jesus, does not always bring blessing and prosperity, but suffering and persecution. Love your enemies, you say. Turn the other cheek. Blessed are the meek and the poor and the hungry and the peacemakers. Seventy-times seven you must forgive. As you forgive those who trespass against you, so your trespasses will be forgiven. And if you cause a little one to stumble, it will be better if a millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea. Your self-giving,

justice-seeking love is not easy to imitate, Jesus. It's hard to do without a little help.

Jesus keeps asking those disciples of his for more. And if I were one of his disciples, I would be starting to feel more and more discouraged. If I were a disciple, at this point in the story, I would start to wonder if I could be a disciple at all. It requires so much. My goodness, Lord, the disciples are saying, we're not sure we can do this. We're not sure we have what it takes. But we don't want to let you down. Just help us, Lord. Increase our faith. We believe; help our unbelief. Increase our faith. Give us more. Give us more.

Bless their hearts, these disciples have come so far with Jesus; they have been through so much with him. And it's getting to be pretty late in the game. To use an October baseball analogy, it's the playoffs, in game seven, and it's the bottom of the ninth and the bases are loaded. Today we are in the seventeenth chapter of Luke and things are getting pretty intense for Jesus and his followers. This is when faith really matters. Because things are taking a turn for the worse. The world is starting to press in on them. The crowds that surround them are more demanding.

The Pharisees and scribes are more and more determined to get rid of them. And Jesus is talking more and more about suffering and persecution and death. It does not look like things are going to end well. And it's getting harder and harder to trust and believe.

So the disciples pull Jesus aside. They lean in with furrowed brows. They whisper intently in his ear. Come on now, Jesus. Now is the time we need you. We are facing some scary stuff and you keep expecting more and more from us. And we're struggling here. We are struggling to keep the faith. Honestly, we don't know what we are doing half the time. We don't know what we're saying. And for the most part, you tell us, o ye of little faith, you've gotten it wrong. We're trying here, Lord. We're trying to follow you. We are trying to be your disciples. We are trying to make you proud of us. But we could use some help, Lord. Increase our faith. Help us, Lord. We need more.

Maybe you have asked Jesus for the same thing. Maybe you've been there with those disciples. Saying, Help me, Lord. Increase my faith. Increase my strength. Help me believe. Help me trust—through this illness, through this crisis, through this present darkness. Help me.

Increase my faith. Help me know that you are with me, God. That you can act. That you can save. That you can love me so much that you won't lose me. That you can love this world so much that you'll give your Son, yourself, for us. That you can love us so much that not even death will keep you from us. That the light shines in the darkness and the darkness does not overcome it. Because of your faithfulness, O Lord. Because of your faith. I want to be faithful too, God. Help me believe it and live it. Lord, increase my faith!

We want more, Lord. More certainty. More trust. More commitment. Give us more. Increase our faith. Now if someone came into my office and said that they wanted more, that they wanted to increase their faith, I would be pretty excited. I mean, if anyone came to me and said, Pastor, I want more faith. I want more spiritual strength, let me tell you, that would make my day. I mean, that's why I'm here. I can help. I've got books. I've got devotionals. I can talk with you about your prayer life. I'll sign you up for Sunday school and a mission committee. Increasing faith, that's what we do in the church. That's what we work on and that should be what Jesus is about too. But wait a second. Would you look at

that? That's not what Jesus does. He's doesn't try to give them more. He doesn't give them any advice about faith. He doesn't give them any books or teach them any tips or tricks. He doesn't even give them much encouragement. He doesn't give them much at all. Except the assurance that more isn't what they need. They don't need more faith. The little they have is enough; the tiniest bit, a mustard seed's worth, it's enough to do amazing things.

It's strange, isn't it? The disciples come asking Jesus for more faith. And surely having more would be a good thing. Surely you could never have too much. So why not indulge those hard-working disciples? Why not give them more?

Perhaps the lesson Jesus has for us today is that more isn't always more. And the more we might be asking for will actually make our faith less. Maybe Jesus is saying that it's OK. It's OK to live with doubt. It's OK to live with uncertainty. And sometimes we need to so that we will understand that faith is not about us having it all together, it's about God having it all together. With faith, as with everything in life, we can be tempted to make things about us. Faith becomes an achievement. It

becomes a badge. It becomes something to master and acquire.

Something to be an expert in. Not a gift from God. Jesus says the faith of a child, that's what we need. Faith that looks to God and depends on God, even if that faith is only as big as a mustard seed. That's all we need. That's not to say we can't grow and learn and deepen in faith. But it's not an arms race.

Second, when we become fixated on having more faith, that can become a distraction to faith. Love God. Love your neighbor. It's pretty simple.

Serve God. Serve others. Stop worrying about getting more of something for yourself. Faith is not just about us and what we believe personally. Faith happens when we participate in the life of God with others. It comes in doing together what we God calls us to do. Jesus tells the disciples this shocking story today about servants who come in from the field and then must make their master's supper. We are stunned by the overtime they have to put in, but these servants don't expect attention or thanks. They are so committed to the work of the master. So committed to just doing their jobs together, they don't think about not doing their jobs. It's not about them. It's about the master. "So you also

like those slaves say, we have done only what we ought to have done.”

Just do what you ought to do. Act with compassion. Look to the needs of those around you. Forgive. Serve. Just do the work of the kingdom and faith will come.

Third, when it comes to faith, a little goes a long way. We seem to think more is more. And we always need more in our arsenal when we are facing the firepower of our enemies. But Jesus assures us that we don’t. Why? Because faith is powerful. More powerful than we imagine. Just a small light pierces the darkness. Just one word can change someone’s life. One act of compassion. One meal at a table together can bring God’s kingdom into this world. And the best part is that we get so much more out of it than we put in. Because it’s not about us. We don’t have to perfect. We don’t have to be full of faith. We don’t even have to be ready for God. Because it’s not about us. It’s about God. It’s not about our faithfulness. It’s about God’s faithfulness. And time and time again,

God reminds us that we don't need to have more anything before God will call us, or use us, or love us.¹

Lord, increase our faith. Jesus says, that little speck can move mountains. Lord, increase our faith. Jesus says, you don't need to be a superhero. Just do what you ought to do. Lord, increase our faith. Jesus says, Just come here and take your place at the table. Come here, eat and drink, and it will be enough. I'll be with you. Come here, eat and drink, pass the food, serve one another. Come here and take your place at the table. Just as you are, full of doubt and uncertainty, weary from worry and work, with faith the size of a mustard seed. Come here and take your place at the table and let me serve you. Trust me. There will be enough. There will be more than enough.

¹ Rick Morley, <http://www.rickmorley.com/archives/2761>