

Big things happen little by little... Miracles happen because of the faith God has given us... It's God's work and our hands... Faith is surprising... Faith can do unusual things, like Jesus says in our reading, even uprooting mulberry trees!

Our scripture readings for this morning all involve that mysterious thing called faith. From Habakkuk we read that the righteous live by their faith. Paul encourages Timothy to "Hold (onto) the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus." And in our gospel reading, the apostles ask Jesus to "increase our faith."

And so, this morning I'd like to do a little reflecting on faith. And to be honest; faith is not something that is easy to define or describe. Faith is such a big topic; we can never finish talking about it...

Every time I think I might know something about faith, my heart tells me the mystery is larger than my head can comprehend. So, to reflect on faith, we always need a good dose of humility, a fair measure of graciousness, and perhaps even a pinch of uncertainty.

One of the things we associate with Faith is healing, Jesus often says "your faith has made you well." Healing is the body's ability to repair itself. In the gospels, Jesus not only repairs bodies, Jesus also repairs their emotional and spiritual being as well. Through faith, Jesus bring wholeness.

Biblically, healing or wholeness often includes some form of touch. The "laying on of hands" is often connected with healing. Touch communicates care, concern and love. In a very real way faith is not just an individual thing, it involves others,

church is not a group of individuals, church is a community of people who love and support each other.

Quick story... And I haven't talked about his before... In 2010 I suffered my first Pulmonary Embolism. A blood clot in my right lung. Further testing showed I have a vulnerability to blood clots! And I did have a second Pulmonary Embolism several years later, and I've been on blood thinners ever since.

The time after that first blood clot was difficult. I was not only physically broken; I was also emotionally broken. I struggled for a way to interpret it—what did it mean? I kept looking for answers...

And that same summer my garden was a huge disaster! Oh, I had planted it, but because of the embolism, I couldn't do any work in it. Every time I looked at the garden I was reminded of my weakness.

At the entrance to the garden, many years prior, I had built an arbor. I made it, I had some grape vines on it, it was unique I liked it... And the birds liked it too, they were always roosting on it...

And with the birds came those pesky mulberry weeds. Birds are good at distributing mulberry seed! Initially, I thought it might be kind of fun to let a couple of them grow... So, I carefully pruned a few of those mulberry saplings and creatively wove them into the arbor. I was wondering if they might set fruit.

A few days after the first blood clot, it was raining cats and dogs, the ground was soft and saturated, the wind was blowing furiously... And the arbor toppled over into a big heap of twisted vines, wood and Mulberry saplings. I was depressed.

The whole tangled mess seemed to be a metaphor for my health. And because it happened during a time when I was most painful, it seemed to taunt me because I couldn't do anything about it. I had a blood clot in my right lung, and everything seemed to be falling apart. It was a dark time. I wondered how to interpret it...

And then slowly, little by little, things started to change.

Within a couple days I started receiving cards and letters from people everywhere, from the congregation in Austin, from people in Cannon and Welch... People wishing me well, I literally had a tsunami of cards and letters... It was so, very, meaningful... I also remember a visit from Pastor Albing...

You can't imagine how it feels to be on the receiving end of all that love. Every card and letter was a "laying on of hands," and I laughed and cried and cherished **each and every single one** of them. Little by little, the faith of others was restoring my health.

Several months after the embolism and when I was finally feeling stronger, I stood at the toppled arbor, and I resolved to clean it up little by little. There is an old Confucian saying that "A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step." So, I bent over and pulled some weeds. Then I had a better view at all the vines and brush. It was beyond saving; I could only cut it all down and start over.

So, I started slowly in one corner. I cut the vines, I cut the mulberry saplings, I tugged and yanked on that brush. It was all twisted together like a giant bird's nest. Finally, I was able to get it all hauled away, then I started to dig out the mulberry roots...

Oh my Goodness! Talk about work! Don't let those mulberry plants get started! They are tougher than nails to get rid of! Eventually through the course of a couple afternoons I dug out the roots and kept them like a trophy. In fact, I kept them and they're hung on my garden wall today!

It felt so good to look at the garden and not see all the mess. And you know-- I patted myself on the back because I had pretty much finished the whole project by myself. And the meaning of that slowly dawned on me; I had finished the project, myself; I had regained enough strength. The embolism and the chaos around it finally seemed cleared and I decided for myself that I was healed.

I think faith and wholeness is this kind of a process, little by little; it happens in community, through other people expressing love and support, it happens slowly, and it is always a miracle.

In our gospel lesson, the apostles ask Jesus to "Increase our faith!" Perhaps they're afraid they don't have enough.

Jesus seems to suggest that it's not the size of our faith that matters; faith the size of a mustard seed is plenty. And a mustard seed is tiny, tiny, tiny... It's not the size of our faith that matters, but rather, what we do with the faith we have that matters.

Faith is the vehicle God uses within us; it is a mix of imagination, energy, courage, trust, belief, and hope. I think Jesus is saying that faith draws us out of ourselves; faith brings us into relationship, faith drives out fear, and faith imagines how to love our neighbor. Faith comes from God; and it is God who orchestrates faith within us to bring forth His Kingdom.

Both of our churches, Cannon River and Cross of Christ, act out in faith to love God, and to love our neighbor. Whether it's organizing community events or through our offerings, our hearts are directed outward. We are not church for our sake, but for the sake of our families and our communities.

Both of our churches have saints that go above and beyond. And believe me, you know who these people are! People who work quietly behind the scenes, connecting, supporting, doing what needs to be done.

And not to be getting any kind of reward. Just to simply serve, a neighbor. This is kingdom work, and it was its own reward. It's meaningful, it's about belonging, love, participation and connection. Loving our neighbor is faith in action. It is what it is, it does what it does.

And that's the good news for today. God is the giver of faith. We testify to that gift as we love one another. In all the ways we help each other, encourage one another, support one another, journey with one another we have the faith of that mustard seed, and miraculous things are happening all the time.

And as crazy as it sounds, even mulberry trees are being dug up! Big things happen little by little, and miracles happen, and we are all richly blessed. Amen...