



Sermons from Northwood United Church

“More or Less Faithful”

Psalm 137, 2 Timothy 1:1-14, Luke 17:5-6

Will Sparks October 6, 2013

May the words of my mouth, the meditations of our hearts, and the actions of our lives be acceptable in your sight O God, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

If a group of lions is called a pride and a gathering of Yaks is called a herd, and a collection of fish is called a school but a collection of whales is called a pod, what do you call a group of people? Well, that’s easy. You might call them Sparks, or Pacamarras, or Hendersons. You might call them Bacon Brothers, or Mac users, or Liberals or Conservatives. I heard a new one the other day: “Bronies.” Do you know what Bronies are. They are guys who like to watch my little pony on TV. There was a convention a few weeks ago in Richmond and hundreds of guys gathered, fans of the children’s show.

Can’t say I’ve ever seen it but whether its names, geographic regions, special interests, all serve to define communities, setting people off from one another, surrounding them with definition and sometimes with walls. Today we recall a different sort of community, one that transcends all such groupings, one that gathers around a table and discovers an identity in the hunger for the bread of life and the cup of blessing. This is Worldwide Communion Sunday. Starting almost 24 hours ago in a Pacific Archipelago on the other side of the international date line, and continuing around the globe, people with different names, different races, speaking different languages, holding divergent political views, have done the things we are about to do here, and have been reminded that we are one people, scattered throughout the whole inhabited earth.

Well, how lovely, and wouldn’t it be nice if we really felt a tangible unity and a physical, emotional, spiritual connection with our sisters and brothers who also break the bread. Wouldn’t it be nice if today we could take one step in the direction of that grand and powerful goal of repairing the fabric of the human tapestry? Wouldn’t it be nice if we could identify a common unity in faith even the size of a mustard seed?

The Hebrew people in exile were united. They had lost everything: their homeland, their nation, their livelihood, their freedom, their religious life which had surrounded the now destroyed temple. They had lost everything. But they were united in their grief and their lament. That is where our psalm comes from this week. “By the waters of Babylon we sat down and wept when we remembered Zion. How can we sing the Lord’s song in a strange land.” How can we hang on to the joyful songs of our faith when all the outward and many of the inward signs of our faith are gone. And so they sang lament, and somehow, that lament became the seed of faith that held them through the dark night.

The disciples come to Jesus and ask him, “Increase our faith.” We had an interesting discussion about this in Bible Study on Thursday morning. What were they asking for exactly? Were they asking for faith, as in a set of beliefs? Increase our doctrine? Or were they asking for faith as in a set of practices and prayers? They only had a few and wanted more? Increase our religious life. Or were they asking for a greater sense of trust? Increase our trust in God that things will be ok. Increase our ability to let go when we feel vulnerable instead of dwelling on our inability to control things. Increase our ability to put our lives in God’s hands the way Paul talks about it to Timothy, a trust in the power and love and spirit of God. I think that was it.

Because when you face an uncertain future like they did, much as we face an uncertain future, that is the need. Trust.

Now who among us does not hunger for that? For a deeper grounding in the presence of the Holy, for an easier trust that things will be ok, for a calmer heart in the face of adversity. Increase that Jesus. And his response to his disciples is, even a mustard seed size portion of that will make a difference. If you hunger for faith like that, start small, just begin, and you will be amazed at what can grow from there.

So what does that mean for us here, at Northwood, in the context of this communion of people who gather around the table all over the world? What does it mean to fine the tiny seed of faith which unites us in the sharing of the bread and the cup? It means that regardless of the languages we speak at the table, regardless of the nuances of theology in the words we craft for this gathering, regardless of pageantry or simplicity of the ritual, regardless whether this table is set in a cathedral with a huge pipe organ, a mud hut singing acapella, open air, or beneath a blue tarp covering a leaky roof, we are united in our hunger for faith, and that is the grain, the mustard seed that ultimately matters. We are united in our need to trust God with all aspects of our life: with our children and our parents, with our work and our health, in our private life and in our politics, with our broken past and our uncertain future, with our spiritual life and our buildings and property, with our failures and our successes. We are united in our need to trust some greater reality, some greater purpose, some greater mystery which holds our life.

So, whether you are a Sparks, or a Dahliwal, a Democrat or a Tea Partier, a young person wondering where you fit in to this complicated world, or a senior wondering about the sturdiness of your pension, come bring your hunger, bring your awareness of the ways in which you need to let go and trust God, gather around the table of God's grace, and let that mustard seed faith be fed. Amen.