



Life Is A Marathon, Not A Sprint

Pastor John Klawiter

October 2, 2022

Sixteenth Sunday After Pentecost

Luke 17:5-10

Grace and peace to you my friends in faith,

Today is the Medtronic Twin Cities marathon (starting line). 26.2 miles.

I signed up to run this marathon once. 16 years ago. I was training with my friend, Tim, and he got me to a 13 mile run. When I finished, I was finished.

How on earth would I be able to go TWICE as far?!

But a larger excuse lingered. The marathon was around the due date of my oldest daughter. I wasn't going to miss that moment, so my head convinced me "why do all this work if there was a chance I wouldn't get to complete it?"

I halted my training program and I didn't run. The race was on a Sunday, October 1st... Adina was born on Wednesday, the 4th. I would've made it, with room to spare.

I lacked faith that I'd be able to do it. I didn't want to invest the effort without the payoff, without the reward.

Maybe I should've gone for it...

What if I had increased my faith??? If I had more faith that I wouldn't have missed out, would I have done it? pause

The disciples, when presented with a test of their faith, ask Jesus for more of it.

5 The apostles said to the Lord: "Increase our faith!" 6 The Lord replied, "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.

What does that even mean? What kind of weird metaphor even is that?

Eugene Peterson provides a contemporary translation that helps... a little bit:

6 But the Master said, "You don't need more faith. There is no 'more' or 'less' in faith. If you have a bare kernel of faith, say the size of a poppy seed, you could say to this sycamore tree, 'Go jump in the lake,' and it would do it.



Peterson's claim is you don't need MORE faith. Faith isn't a measurable stat.

But he still makes this odd statement about having a small amount of faith and uprooting trees.

I think it's important to ask "Why do the disciples ask Jesus to increase their faith?"

It's because of the previous verses. When told about forgiveness, the disciples realize that this is a hard lesson. They want to be prepared when difficult tests are put upon their faith.

If only I had more spiritual will power, they think, then I can easily forgive my brother who has wronged me.

Jesus's silly example of uprooting trees is like saying "not so fast." We have the wrong idea about what faith can do.

Our faith doesn't uproot trees. Our faith doesn't move mountains. We aren't faith magicians.

I haven't moved any oak or willow trees lately through my prayer life, but I have seen healing in members of our church. I've personally felt peace when overcome with stressful situations. Faith, metaphorically speaking, is a difference maker.

Faith is a way of life and is our hearts pointed towards God.

Faith is what gets us through the pain when we forgive others who've harmed us. Faith is a conversation partner with God when life doesn't make sense.

Faith is what happens when we see the destruction of our earth, like the damage done from Hurricane Ian, and we say "I can help." Faith is healing. Faith is helping. Faith is doing.

A pastor I follow wondered about this story. He wrote:

"I'm not sure that a lot of people really want more faith. They may want more of the faith that will help them out – a faith that might heal themselves or a loved one, a faith that will help them pass a test, a faith that gives them assurance of eternal life; but do they really want a faith that will make them more Christ-like in sacrificial giving, in sacrificial loving, in sacrificial forgiving? I'm not sure if people want that."

Faith isn't a good luck charm or an insurance policy. Faith is a state of being a follower of Christ.

What does it look like?



I got a phone call earlier this week from a member who told me about an experience she had last Sunday.

She was driving with family in Minneapolis on an unfamiliar street (traffic) when a man was walking in traffic in front of them.

They stopped the car and she got out and recognized that he was blind, with a white cane (cane). He had some listening devices that were apparently giving him misinformation—including sending him directly into this busy street with oncoming traffic.

She quickly helped him across the way and told him what he needed to do to get to his destination.

The man realized what happened and thanked her profusely for getting out and helping him. He said “you saved my life!”

She didn’t even process this event until later that night when she remembered the children’s message from worship—when Connor was blindfolded and only when he received assistance from a friend was he able to get where he needed to go.

We aren’t coming to church, a church actually named FAITH after all, to be loaded up with a blind faith—one where we just hope we’re doing the right thing. We aren’t begging God for more faith that helps us succeed all on our own.

No, our faith is increased by walking in faith as a community of believers.

Whether we are here, or in Sunday School, or attending confirmation classes on Wednesday... or even if you’re watching this after the fact because you wanted to watch the Vikings game live or run a marathon.

I won’t even throw a flag on you for delay of game (throw the flag). Faith is a journey, not an asset. Faith is not a transaction that we acquire at baptism, like Luke and Parker this morning.

Luke and Parker are welcomed into this community—claimed as beloved children of God—that faith is part of the rest of their lives.

They don’t do it alone. Their parents, godparents, and our community of believers, we help them as they live out their faith.

Did you notice how the gospel story ended today? Jesus talked about the workers out in the field who come in and then are expected to get dinner ready. It might sound strange, harsh.



Eugene Peterson worded it in a way that I appreciated:

“Suppose one of you has a servant who comes in from plowing the field or tending the sheep.

Would you take his coat, set the table, and say, ‘Sit down and eat’?

Wouldn’t you be more likely to say, ‘Prepare dinner; change your clothes and wait table for me until I’ve finished my coffee; then go to the kitchen and have your supper’?

Does the servant get special thanks for doing what’s expected of him? It’s the same with you.

When you’ve done everything expected of you, be matter-of-fact and say, ‘The work is done. What we were told to do, we did.’”

Do what is expected of us.

As my Grandpa John would say:

“Do the thing you’re supposed to do when you’re supposed to do it.”

Faith is a long-term habit. We gather in church to be spiritually fed and nourished. We will be challenged. We will wrestle with God, like so many of the stories we read in the Bible.

We will grow in trust through continuous conversations with God, through spiritual practices and relationships with other people of faith.

You wouldn’t show up to Minneapolis this morning expecting to complete a marathon without some previous preparation (runner being helped).

Life is a marathon, not a sprint. Faith is filled with helpers—members who have energy to serve, teach, and care for one another. Faith is also a place where it’s ok to admit we need help taking the next step forward.

Our loving God celebrates (happy runners) with us as we endure the challenges of this world... as we forge ahead, confident that we have the faith to change the world together. Amen.