

occurs, until more volunteers arise, more offerings come in, a larger facility is built before we do ministry and dare to contemplate new avenues of ministry? Should the Church declare its mission "on hold" until at last we are sure we have enough?

Increase our faith, O Lord! It's no wonder the disciples beg for this. All along, in Luke's Gospel, Jesus has been teaching about discipleship and what it involves. Frankly, it involves a lot, and it is difficult and full of challenges. Like prioritizing and placing Jesus first above all other things. Like being generous with your wealth, not letting it rule you, and caring for the poor at your doorstep. Like being careful not to become a stumbling block for other believers. Like forgiving someone who asks your forgiveness, even if you've been wronged seven times over by that person. *C'mon Jesus, we're going to need more faith before we can tackle any of these things. We don't have enough right now. So we'll just sit here and wait till you give us more faith.*

Increase our faith! That must have sounded silly and foolish to Jesus' ears. Jesus won't give them a "bye" week on discipleship. He won't excuse them from their responsibility. He does not grant the disciples a rest stop along the way until somehow they acquire more faith. Jesus will have none of that. He tells them right then and there that just a little bit of faith, even the size of a mustard seed, is enough and sufficient for them to do God's work in the world and be his disciples. Really. And he makes clear that he **expects** them to do God's work and be his disciples, because that's what they have been called to do. Really.

And if it seems ludicrous to think a little bit of faith, so small you aren't even sure some days it's there, can be enough, then it's because we've convinced ourselves faith is a thing to be obtained and possessed, quantified, measured, counted out and dispensed. That we will need a set amount of faith for this particular life situation, but a much, much larger amount of faith for that particular life situation.

What if, instead, we realized faith, as a gift from God, is not a thing but a relationship? A relationship God makes possible with us through Jesus Christ his Son. Faith is all about trusting that relationship. Trusting that God establishes a loving relationship with you and me so we can live secure in the shelter of his strength and power, and participate in his kingdom, and serve him by serving others with joy. That relationship is happening right now because you and I (along with Levi and Luke) have been baptized into the life of Jesus Christ who, in fact, already has that same kind of relationship with God the Father. That relationship is now, and we don't have to wait around or put ourselves "on hold" until we think we finally have enough of whatever it is we need to be his disciples.

Uproot a mulberry tree by your word alone, and have it cast into the sea? Well, I don't know about that, but I tell you, if you take the time to look around, you will see some awesome ministry being done: People giving generously of themselves, their time, their possessions. Prayers spoken on behalf of others. Compassion and care for those who are hurting. Studying and learning together, and then sharing with others what we've learned about God and his loving intentions for creation. Facing challenging times with courage, knowing God is our strength, our

fortress who remains with us through them. All these actions in our everyday lives are based on simple faith, just a little bit of faith, and **they** are the signs and wonders of a powerful God. If only we recognize them as such.

Okay. Mark this day down as the day that Pastor Nancy Easton admitted she was wrong. Good grief, it's even going to be on our digital recording our sound operator is creating up there in the balcony! October 3, 2010: Pastor Nancy Easton admits she was wrong. For far too long I have spoken about "growing in faith"—it's a simple phrase that I've tossed about pretty glibly over the years. *By doing thus-and-such, we will grow in faith. My prayers are that our faith will grow blah, blah, blah.*

Can I not hear at last what Jesus is telling his disciples, and telling you and me? Maybe there's no real way to "make our faith grow"—no technique to implement or church program to purchase. Maybe we don't need to ask Jesus to *increase* our faith at all.

What I really should have been saying all these years is that I hope you and I **grow into** the faith we've already been given in this relationship God has with us, his beloved children, through his beloved son Jesus. What I really should have been praying about all these years is for God to help us **live out** the faith we've been given by him. **That** faith is more than enough. **AMEN.**

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