

“What We Don't Have”

Luke 17:5-10, II Timothy 1:1-14

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As most of you know by now, we have a wedding in our family in about 13 days. Most of you also know how all consuming weddings can be. Have we done everything we should? Are all the details taken care of? Has everything been paid for? What song will Annie and I dance to? Does my tie match the bridesmaids dresses? Important issues like that. As most of you know too, the wedding will not be here, but will be in Massachusetts. It would have been nice if it could have been here. There could have been a lot of advantages to holding the wedding here. This is the church that Annie grew up in, the only one she's really known. I would have liked to show it off to Stacey's family. We'd also be saving a lot on the travel and hotel expenses too. Weddings tend to bring out those discussions about what we wish we had. I wish we could have a string quartet playing for the ceremony. I wish my father was well enough to travel from Texas for the wedding, he hasn't seen the kids in several years. I wish my close friends from high school and college could come and make it a reunion type weekend. But as I'm often reminded, this is Annie and Stacey's wedding, not mine.

And that's when I think about what I do have. Yes, I wish it was here, but all three of our kids now live in the Boston area, so it's easier that it would be there. And not only that, they live there because they want to be close to each other. They live within about 10 minutes of each other, they hang out together, they help each other, they *want* to be together. And that's more important than the location of the wedding. But we all do that, don't we? Focus on what we don't have?

That's what happens to the disciples in this passage from Luke. Right before the section we read, Jesus says to his disciples, “Be on your guard! If another disciple sins, you must rebuke the offender, and if there is repentance, you must forgive. And if the same person sins against you seven times a day, and turns back to you seven times and says, “I repent,” you must forgive.” That when the apostles turn to

him and say, "Increase our faith!" Which is probably a nice way of saying, "No way! We can't do that! That's too hard. Who can do something like that? We'd have to be saint to do that. If that's what you want, you'd better increase our faith." Forgive seven times in the same day? How crazy is that? Could you do that? Have you ever felt like that? Have you ever been asked to do something that you are just not equipped to do? Have you ever felt like you might be able to do it if you had enough faith? Like forgive someone? "I just can't forgive her. I guess I'm just not a big enough person." "Teach Sunday School? Me? Never. I don't know enough, no one wants to hear what I have to say." "Serve as a deacon? No way? Those are people who really believe, I mean they believe enough to sit and pray with someone, I could never do that." "Help with the youth. I couldn't. Those kids get so out of control and I wouldn't know what to do." "Give money to the church, make a pledge? But I'm not sure what my income will be next year, how can I pledge an amount when I don't know what I'll have?" That's when we hear the voice of Jesus say, "If you had faith the size of a mustard seed . . ." The point of this story is that you do have faith. God has given you everything you need to be a disciple. You don't have enough faith, enough skill, enough talent, enough energy? God asks that we take what we do have, and let him use it. He's given us everything we need to be his disciple. He only asks that we think not about what we do not have, but what we do have.

Parker Palmer once said, "I remember talking with a friend who has worked for many years at the Catholic Worker, a ministry to the poor in New York City. Daily she tries to respond to waves of human misery that are as ceaseless as surf in that community. Out of my deep not-knowing I asked how she could keep doing a work that never showed any results, a work in which the problems keep getting worse instead of better. I will never forget her enigmatic answer: 'The thing you don't understand, Parker, is that just because something is impossible doesn't mean you shouldn't do it!'"

Exactly. Not what we do not have, but what we do have. In the church do we stress about what we do not have? No enough money, not enough space, not enough time, not enough energy, not enough

people, not enough, not enough; and so our temptation is then to do nothing. What do we do when we don't have enough youth? One or two kids coming isn't enough. We should just give up, right. Or we take what seems like just a mustard seed and we give it to God and we look around and see a different way. And it's amazing what God can do. Because in the end, that's the point—what God can do. This is not about our efforts, it is God working through us. As Paul told Timothy, faith, however much we have, is the gift of God within us, the treasure entrusted to us.

This old story maybe especially appropriate this year:

There was a woman who wanted peace in the world and peace in her heart and all sorts of good things, but she was very frustrated. The world seemed to be falling apart. She would read the papers and get depressed. One day she decided to go shopping, and she went into a mall and picked a store at random. She walked in and was surprised to see Jesus behind the counter. She knew it was Jesus, because he looked just like the pictures she'd see on holy cards and devotional pictures. She looked again and again at him, and finally she got up her nerve and asked, "Excuse me, are you Jesus?" "I am." "Do you work here?" "No," Jesus said, "I own the store." "Oh, what do you sell in here?" "Oh, just about anything!" "Anything?" "Yeah, anything you want. What is it that you want?" She said, "I don't know." "Well," Jesus said, "feel free, walk up and down the aisles, make a list, see what it is you want, then come back and we'll see what we can do for you."

She did just that, walked up and down the aisles. There was peace on earth, no more war, no hunger or poverty, peace in families, no more drugs, harmony, clean air, careful use of resources. She wrote furiously. By the time she got back to the counter, she had a long list. Jesus took the list, skimmed through it, looked up at her and smiled. "No problem." And then he bent down behind the counter and picked out all sorts of things, stood up, and laid out the packets. She asked, "What are these?" Jesus replied, "Seed packets. This is a catalog store." She said, "You mean I don't get the finished product?" "No, this is a place of dreams. You come and see what it looks like, and I give you the seeds. You

plant the seeds. You go home and nurture them and help them grow and someone else reaps the benefits.” “Oh . . .” she said. And she left the store without buying anything.

That's what we do here. We have all those things—thriving church, peace in families, strong discipleship, effective mission work, great youth programs, joyful fellowship, healing wounds, seniors sharing their wisdom with younger generations, uplifting worship. There are all right here. Some are growing around us right now. Some are still seeds. We just need to make sure we are planting them, watering them. We work with what we have, not what we don't have. But we get to watch them grow!