

Week of July 11, 2021

Matthew 17:1-23

¹Six days later Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, and brought them to the top of a very high mountain. ²He was transformed in front of them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as light. ³Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Jesus. ⁴Peter reacted to all of this by saying to Jesus, "Lord, it's good that we're here. If you want, I'll make three shrines: one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." ⁵While he was still speaking, look, a bright cloud overshadowed them. A voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son whom I dearly love. I am very pleased with him. Listen to him!" ⁶Hearing this, the disciples fell on their faces, filled with awe. ⁷But Jesus came and touched them. "Get up," he said. "Don't be afraid." ⁸When they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus. ⁹As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus commanded them, "Don't tell anybody about the vision until the Human One is raised from the dead." ¹⁰The disciples asked, "Then why do the legal experts say that Elijah must first come?" ¹¹Jesus responded, "Elijah does come first and will restore all things. ¹²In fact, I tell you that Elijah has already come, and they didn't know him. But they did to him whatever they wanted. In the same way the Human One is also going to suffer at their hands." ¹³Then the disciples realized he was telling them about John the Baptist.

¹⁴When they came to the crowd, a man met Jesus. He knelt before him, ¹⁵saying, "Lord, show mercy to my son. He is epileptic and suffers terribly, for he often falls into the fire or the water. ¹⁶I brought him to your disciples, but they couldn't heal him." ¹⁷Jesus answered, "You faithless and crooked generation, how long will I be with you? How long will I put up with you? Bring the boy here to me." ¹⁸Then Jesus spoke harshly to the demon. And it came out of the child, who was healed from that time on. ¹⁹Then the disciples came to Jesus in private and said, "Why couldn't we throw the demon out?" ²⁰"Because you have little faith," he said. "I assure you that if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you could say to this mountain, 'Go from here to there,' and it will go. There will be nothing that you can't do." ²²When the disciples came together in Galilee, Jesus said to them, "The Human One is about to be delivered over into human hands. ²³They will kill him. But he will be raised on the third day." And they were heartbroken.

When Seeing Is Believing

Only six days after proclaiming Jesus to be the Christ, Peter (plus James and John) traveled with Jesus to a mountain top where Jesus was transfigured before their eyes, appearing in dazzling white alongside Elijah and Moses. The appearance of the two prophets was an allusion to the belief that they'd appear before the "end of the age," and was thus a sign that Jesus was indeed the Messiah. If the miracles he'd performed weren't proof enough, they now saw a stunning display, including God's own voice calling out of the heavens, that couldn't be anything but proof of Jesus' Lordship. They were suitably confused by the whole encounter - who wouldn't be seeing two figures appearing out of thin air - but the point was made nonetheless. Not only were they given proof of Jesus' Messianic status, but were told that John the Baptist was the reappearance of Elijah, a person the religious authorities dismissed and the Romans had killed, and that Jesus would suffer the same fate.

Upon rejoining the rest of the disciples, Jesus was immediately accosted by a distraught father who was upset that the disciples were not able to heal his son. We may remember that Jesus had already given the disciples the ability to heal, so this is a surprise that they were not able to. Frustrated, Jesus healed the boy. Maybe they sensed Jesus' frustration with them, because they pulled him aside and asked why they couldn't do the healing. Jesus' response was that it was faith, or a lack thereof, that had prevented it. Apparently they hadn't even had faith the size of a mustard seed, because that's all it takes to do great things. When Jesus then again predicted his imminent death, they were stunned - chastised for not being able to perform a simple healing with the power given them because of a lack of faith and then hearing they'd soon be without their Lord. The obvious question is why they had such a lack of faith? Hadn't they been with Jesus throughout his travels and witnessed all the things done by him that no one but God should be able to do?

Unfortunately, the problem that plagued the disciples also plagues us. We're hesitant to trust in the promises of God, so we are unable give fully of ourselves to work toward God's aims as we've been empowered to do. The truth is, actions led by faith can achieve more than we can imagine. While the disciples were heartbroken at the news of Jesus' death and resurrection, we are not - it emboldens our faith, proof of God's salvific love. If we can profess the impossible, the defeat of death by Jesus, then we can trust that our acts of faith can likewise do what we thought was impossible. Poverty can be defeated. Inequality can be wiped out. The Kingdom God promised can be a reality. All it takes is a mustard seed.

Our hope lies with you alone, O God. May we not lose hope in your promises and trust in your great love.

We need only the faith the size of a mustard seed. Enable us to muster even that, and from the works that come from even such small faith, grow it until it cannot be overcome by anything. In Christ, Amen.