

In last week's sermon, I noted that being a Christian is hard and that it requires every fiber of our being to live the Christian life. In the four verses before our reading of today's Gospel, the apostles got the same news from Jesus. They all had that "deer in the headlights" look, stunned at the magnitude of the request, trying to take the enormity of it all in. As the shock begins to wear off, they feel like they must be lacking something, they don't feel at all equipped to meet Jesus' expectations. One bright person says, "give me more faith!" and the others chime in, "yeah, that's it! That's what we need! Give us more faith, Jesus!" and maybe then, they can do as Jesus asks them to do.

Just what did Jesus ask them to do? First he says, don't cause anyone else to sin. Most of us know that sinning by one's self isn't much fun at all, if we're going to sin it's likely to more be enjoyable if more than one of us is involved. Then he tells them that it would be better if a weight were tied around one's neck and then be thrown into the sea than to lead someone into sin. Tough words.

Then he says to correct the one who sins. And if the sinner repents, forgive the sinner. Over and over again. No matter how many times the individual sins against you, if they repent, you must forgive. That's a tall

order. Even in Jesus' time, some people must have been offensive jerks. Folks who just get right under your skin. And if they truly repent, forgive? That's a big ask.

The apostles knew themselves well enough to know that doing either of these things would take some real work and perhaps they didn't feel they were quite up to it. Surely more faith would do the trick, if they had more faith THEN they could live up to Jesus' expectations. I wonder what they thought more faith would enable them to do? Be more persistent? Be more patient? Maybe they wanted to be more trusting or confident or be more committed - all of which are acceptable translations of the Greek which is read as "faith" in this passage.

Jesus gently tells the apostles that it isn't the amount of faith that matters. Having even the smallest amount of faith is enough. Think about using olive oil when cooking, or using grease to lubricate a part - just a tiny amount goes a long way. We use olive oil or grease for a particular purpose so the more pertinent question is *what is faith for?*

The answer is that faith, trust, confidence and commitment - all of these - are the glue that holds relationships together. Jesus wants us to understand that faith is all about a way of life. This is why he talks about

the servant and the master. It might be easier for us to understand if we think about the employer/employee relationship.

When we are in the workforce, we have no expectation of our employer giving us an “attaboy” or even a bonus for simply completing one task in our job description and then moving on to the next task in our job description. This is what we are paid for - we’ve done nothing more than what we were expected to do. In return, we expect to get our paycheck on time and for the amount owed. The employer/employee relationship, just as the master/servant relationship, is characterized by mutual accountability and expectation. In Jesus’ day, the servants were expected to carry out their duties and when they were done, they received nourishment, rest and protection.¹

Here’s Jesus’ teaching then on Discipleship 101 in just four steps as understood by Luke: First, don’t be the cause of another person’s sin. Second, forgive, over and over again when the sinner repents. Third, even a fraction of a drop of faith is enough, and finally, fourth, discipleship is **not** about reward; our charge - like the Nike commercial - is to “just do it!”²

¹ Kimberly Bracken Long, “Pastoral Perspective,” *Feasting on the Word Year C vol 4*, David L. Bartlett & Barbara Brown Taylor, eds., (Westminster John Knox Press: Louisville KY) 2010. 142.

² Audrey West, “Gospel Reading,” www.workingpreacher.org Year C Proper 22

That tiny drop of faith enables us to live in a manner that identifies us as Christians. We've been shown a way of how to live together, how to be accountable to one another, and how to have expectations of one another. Understanding faith as a way of life allows us to serve God and one another out of our sense of duty and joy because we have been shown the way to abundant life.³

These are simple concepts that end up being hard carrying out. Let me give you some examples from our own parish. A few of you are adamantly opposed to the design and components of our new sign. I have heard from you and your comments have been shared with the Vestry. The Vestry heard the concerns. It may seem like there are winners and losers in this, yet from my perspective so far, not yet. Those who disagree have made their disagreement known in the most polite and respectful of ways, and some have expressed regret in not being able to support the new sign. There is mutual accountability here and I am so pleased that those who don't agree have shared their concerns. We aren't going to agree on everything yet what I see is that grace is being extended by all parties, that feeling of "we're in this together" remains, we are still a parish family

³ Kimberly Bracken Long, "Pastoral Perspective," *Feasting on the Word, Year C vol 4*, (Westminster John Knox Press: Louisville, KY) 2010. 142

despite our disagreement. If there are hard feelings, I trust that we can forgive one another and move on, joyfully continuing to worship together here Sunday after Sunday.

The other example I have is our covenantal agreement with St. George's. Not everyone agrees that the respective vestries have made the right choice. We would not be human if we didn't feel some anxiety and uncertainty about the implications of the covenant and what it might mean for us as a community. Mutual accountability and mutual expectations are absolutely required to make living into the covenant agreement work. Dissenting voices are necessary so that our leadership can think through the issues and avoid unintended consequences. Mistakes are going to be made because we are early pioneers in this effort. Knowing that we have a mandate to be humble when we have made such a mistake and to seek ...forgiveness plus knowing there is a reciprocal mandate that forgiveness will be given makes the task less daunting. Knowing that just a tiny bit of faith will keep us going as a witnessing community for Christ allow us to "just do it."

Let's not be afraid of the task because it is hard. Most things worth having are hard to achieve. Just a little faith will enable us to forgive one

another, keep fear at bay, take risks, express our needs, and continue to praise God together. With just this amount of faith, THIS is the community I am delighted to be a part of, and I hope you are too.

AMEN.