

Sermon Note: Faith to Change

Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost

Introduction

This Sunday begins our series **Standing on the Shoulders of Giants**, a time to honor the faith of those who carried us here. Their presence—showing up in worship, in service, and in prayer—built a community that continues today. In Sunday’s Gospel reading, the disciples face a crossroads of their own. Unsure if they have what it takes to follow, they plead, “Increase our faith!” Jesus answers that even faith as small as a mustard seed can change their entire perspective. A reading from Deuteronomy reminds us that this faith is not only believed but lived—taught to children, written on doorframes, carried into the ordinary patterns of life. As we begin this season, we hear a call to presence: to keep showing up, trusting that even small faith can leave a legacy greater than we imagine.

Illustration Videos

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xh-Tof_QxKU

In this clip from *This Is Us* (2016), Kevin tries to explain life and death to his young nieces by comparing it to a painting, where every person adds color that remains even after they are gone.

Why This Video?

Kevin’s heartfelt explanation gives us a way to think about presence and legacy through the eyes of children. His painting metaphor invites us to imagine that the people who came before us remain part of who we are, even when they’re no longer physically here. The clip highlights honesty, vulnerability, and the power of simply showing up for others. It reminds us that our lives connect to a much larger story, and that even small acts of presence can leave a lasting mark.

Video Discussion Questions

1. How do Kevin’s words about adding “color” to the painting make you think differently about the people in your life?
2. What feelings did you notice in the children as they listened to Kevin? How did his honesty shape their response?
3. Kevin admits he’s scared of talking about death. Why do you think sharing his painting helped him connect with his nieces anyway?
4. The painting in Kevin’s story becomes a picture of both the past and the future. Who in your life has “added color” to your story?
5. What kind of “color” do you hope your presence adds to the lives of others?
6. Kevin suggests that even when someone dies, they remain part of the painting. How does that idea comfort or challenge you?

7. Why do you think Kevin chose to talk to the girls about something so deep instead of keeping it simple?
8. How does this clip show the difference between giving answers and simply being present with someone?

Deuteronomy 6:4-9 (NRSVue)

¹“Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. ⁵You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. ⁶Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. ⁷Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. ⁸Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, ⁹and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

Luke 17:5-10 (CEB)

⁵The apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our faith!”

⁶The 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.

⁷“Would any of you say to your servant, who had just come in from the field after plowing or tending sheep, ‘Come! Sit down for dinner?’ ⁸Wouldn’t you say instead, ‘Fix my dinner. Put on the clothes of a table servant and wait on me while I eat and drink. After that, you can eat and drink?’ ⁹You won’t thank the servant because the servant did what you asked, will you? ¹⁰In the same way, when you have done everything required of you, you should say, ‘We servants deserve no special praise. We have only done our duty.’”

Scripture Study Questions

1. What do you think the mustard seed represents in this story?
2. In verses 7–9, Jesus describes a servant who finishes laboring in the field, only to be told to serve dinner without thanks. What kind of social system does this story describe?
3. The servant says, “We are worthless slaves; we have only done what we ought to have done.” Is this humility or internalized oppression? How might Jesus be exposing the way unjust systems make people complicit in their own devaluation?
4. Where in our world today are people expected to serve without recognition, dignity, or rest? What would Jesus’ justice-seeking faith say to that reality?
5. How would you rewrite this parable to reflect a different vision of faith—one that resists complicity and imagines mutual service and shared tables?
6. How does Jesus’ parable challenge us not to spiritualize obedience but to question who benefits from it?
7. If faith the size of a mustard seed can uproot a tree, what might your faith uproot today?

Additional (Optional) Questions

1. What did Jesus say in response to the disciples' request to "increase our faith" in Luke 17:5-6?
2. How does Jesus describe the role of faith in the mustard seed analogy? What do you think he meant?
3. How could you apply the idea of having "faith the size of a mustard seed" to a challenge you're currently facing?
4. What similarities can you draw between the disciples' request to increase their faith and how we all might ask God for help in our struggles?
5. Do you think Jesus' response to the disciples' request was fair? Why or why not?
6. What could we do as a church to grow our collective faith this week, inspired by the mustard seed and servant parable in the passage?

Weekly Action

This week, consider one small act of mustard-seed faith that shows your presence in a concrete way. One of our United Methodist membership vows is *Presence*: being present for the next generation as others were present for you. Sometimes presence looks like showing up in worship or with family. Other times it looks like noticing what others ignore: saying thank you to someone whose work goes unseen, inviting someone new to the table, or choosing rest in a world that demands constant output. Ask yourself: what small act of presence can I offer this week that will outlast me?

Prayer

God, You speak not just to increase our faith but also to deepen our courage. May we see through systems that reward silence and invisibility. May we refuse to call oppression holy. Let our faith be bold enough to serve without shame and brave enough to say, "This is not the kingdom." Send us to uproot what harms and plant what liberates. Amen.

Disclosure: This Sermon Note was created by LJUMC staff with resources from Discipleship Ministries of The United Methodist Church and with the support of AI tools.