

October 6, Ordinary 27C (Luke 17:5-10)

## **Have you noticed God's preference for small things?**

by [Dennis Sanders](#) in the [September 25, 2019](#) issue

I love roller coasters. There's something about traveling at high speeds, being dropped from terrifying heights, and feeling like you just might lose your life.

The best place to ride roller coasters, at least in my view, is Cedar Point in Sandusky, Ohio, about an hour west of Cleveland. It's the closest amusement park to my hometown of Flint, Michigan. At last count, Cedar Point had about 18 roller coasters. They are always in an arms race with another park, part of the Six Flags chain. It's a back and forth race: Who has the biggest, baddest roller coaster?

The rest of us tend to look at life this way, too. If something is good, then more of it will be better. So we make faster roller coasters—or live in bigger houses, buy fancier cars, and so on. But living in a culture where bigger is better leaves you thinking that what you do or have isn't enough.

When I was called to be the pastor at my church six years ago, I wondered if I could do it. I spent five years as an associate pastor, but could I really be a solo pastor of a church?

As someone who is on the autism spectrum, I am always wondering if anything is enough. I felt like I entered this profession with so many deficits. Can I preach good sermons? Can I engage in small talk? Can I connect with the congregation? Can I be a leader? Can I be a Christlike presence to those around me? It's hard to look at other pastors—people who are master speakers and can exegete like nobody—and not feel inadequate.

Many people reading this will be dealing with shrinking congregations and budgets. We wonder, can we continue this ministry to the community around us? Can we afford it? Why can't we draw people like that megachurch down the road?

In this week's Gospel reading, the disciples ask Jesus to increase their faith. On the surface, this seems like a dumb request to make. They have been with Jesus for a while, and now they are on their way to Jerusalem. Isn't it a bit late to be asking for a pep talk?

Like us, the disciples tend to think that more is better. If they could only have a bit more faith, then everything would be right as rain. They have seen what Jesus has done. Jesus made blind people see, removed leprosy from the skin of people, cast out demons, fed 5,000 people with a few fish and a little bread, and so much more. How do you live up to that? They realize there is no way that they can do what he did with their puny faith. If they want to do even 10 percent of what Jesus did, they will need an extra-strength faith. That's the world we live in: more is always better.

But Jesus counters this by telling his disciples that to move a mountain, you only need faith the size of a mustard seed. It's not about having enough faith. Being faithful is doing what God would have us do in the world even when we think our faith is incomplete and doesn't measure up. Jesus is not a figure skating judge who rates us on our faith.

Have you noticed God's preference for small things? Gideon, the weakest guy in the land of Israel, is called by God to defeat an occupying army. His 300 men defeat thousands on the other side. When Samuel meets the strong, handsome sons of Jesse, God chooses the youngest, David, over his brothers. And God chooses a young, poor woman—living in Israel under the Roman occupation—as the one who would give birth to Jesus. God is into using what little we have and performing great works.

God doesn't need us to believe enough. God calls us to be faithful—to seek to do God's work in the world. Faithfulness is about being a witness to the grace and mercy of Jesus; it is about trusting in God's faithfulness to us even when our faith is wavering. We are faithful when we proclaim the good news and do acts of compassion, even on those days when our faith seems small. It's faithful to pray with a family when they learn their loved one is not going to get better. It's faithful to bring communion to a church member who can't make it to worship.

The second part of this Gospel text flows from the first. Jesus calls on his disciples to do as he is doing, to be a servant to others. Jesus is headed toward Jerusalem, where he will suffer and die. He will be a servant even unto his own death.

Here Jesus brings up something that is falling out of favor in society: a sense of duty. Duty can sound like a musty old book that hasn't been touched in years. But Jesus is going to be faithful to God even though it means facing an untimely end. He is talking about doing what you are called to do, even when it might cost you.

The disciples don't need more faith, and neither do we. We are called to trust God with the faith we have. It's not a fancy faith and it may not seem like much, but in Christ it will move mountains. It is not about having enough; it's about knowing that we are enough, to the glory of God.