

Ordinary 27C - 2019

I read in one of the commentaries that the point here is not to be able to move trees or mountains, but to recognize what God is doing among the trees and mountains and all of creation, including people. To test the faith is to rely on OUR willpower. However, when we focus on God's will and power, we begin to see the world very differently. Is it possible that the mustard seed parable is about our joining God in God's creative work-- the focus being on God and what God is already doing and God's invitation for us to join in the fun.

Three Small Steps in Our Journey of Faith

One day the great Michelangelo attracted a crowd of spectators as he worked. One child in particular was fascinated by the sight of chips flying and the sound of mallet on chisel. The master was shaping a large block of white marble. Unable to contain her curiosity, the little girl inquired, "What are you making?" He replied, "There is an angel in there and I must set it free."

Every Christian at their confirmation or conversion is handed a large cold white marble block called religion. We must then take the mallet in hand and set to work. Religion is not our goal but we must first start there. Now there are many names for religion. At times we do call it religion but we often use other words and images to describe it. Sometimes we call it our faith. Jesus spoke in terms of the Kingdom of God. We say we are the Church, Christians, or Disciples. There are many names with varying nuances of meaning but in the end they all describe the same thing. We are a people of Faith, faith in Christ to be sure, but faith nonetheless.

We are not a business or institution. We do not sell or produce anything. We advocate no earthly cause. We serve no worldly authority. We come to a church building made by men. And to do what? Practice our faith. But we just as well could have met on a hillside or cave.

Our leader is not here, not so that I can show him to you or offer irrefutable evidence of his existence. That means faith is all we have. We are born through faith, live by faith, and die in faith. After my death, then and only then will I know in full, as the Apostle Paul says, when I see Jesus

face to face. Until then I had better understand this religion thing. Now that sounds pretty daunting doesn't it? Here's the good News. It's not all that difficult. Religion is a marble slab and we have to find, like Michelangelo, the angel inside. Chisel with me a few minutes this morning and let the chips fly, and let's find the faith that lives inside. Faith: it is the angel of our religion. Faith can set us free if we know how to live it. How do you practice your faith and not just religion? Jesus outlined faith in Luke 17. He explained there are three simple ways to exercise faith. Three small steps make up our journey of faith.

1. The First Step Is Learning to Forgive.
2. The Second Step Is Learning to Believe.
3. The Third Step Is Learning to Serve

Several years ago, I was at a symposium at which we were discussing the struggle that many young people have today with their faith. One of the participants, a young French Canadian Oblate, offered this perspective:

I work with university students as a chaplain. They have a zest for life and an energy and color that I can only envy. But inside of all this zest and energy, I notice that they lack hope because they don't have a meta-narrative. They don't have a big story, a big vision that can give them perspective beyond the ups and downs of their everyday lives. When their health, relationships, and lives are going well, they feel happy and full of hope; but the reverse is also true. When things aren't going well the bottom falls out of their world. They don't have anything to give them a vision beyond the present moment.

In essence, what he is describing might be called "the peace that this world can give us." In his farewell discourse, Jesus contrasts two kinds of peace: one that he leaves us and one that the world can give us. What is the difference? The peace that the world can give to us is not a negative or a bad peace. It is real and it is good, but it is fragile and inadequate. (Fr. Ron Rohlheiser)

Accept the Fact

The great theologian Paul Tillich used to say, "Accept the fact that you're accepted." And we might add, "When you do, you will accept all others too and serve them. And no one will owe you anything." And you won't mind that at all. *Richard W. Patt, All Stirred Up, CSS Publishing*