PROPER TWENTY TWO, PENTECOST SEVENTEEN, YEAR C, OCTOBER 5, 2025

In a small book called Random Acts of Kindness by Animals, there is a story about sparrows. In a street in Italy, a fallen sparrow lay helplessly. Soon many other sparrows surrounded it, trying to carry it to safety, away from the heavy traffic. A man got out of his car and waved other drivers away. Traffic then came to a standstill. The sparrows, with great effort, managed to carry the fallen bird to the side of the road. There they rested for a minute, and then managed to prop up the injured bird and fly it over a wall into a garden.

While the motorists remarked over the kindness of the birds, within the world of sparrows it seems what they did was what was expected: it was their norm. What they did is notable among humans, whom universal studies show, do not usually stop when someone is injured along the road. Think about the Parable of the Good Samaritan. It seems sometimes that we show more compassion to animals than to our fellow human beings. We marvel when people stop to help each other. We are incredulous when people forgive each other? Why is that? Shouldn't that be our norm? Doesn't our faith tell us these are the things we're supposed to be doing? Why can't we see that just a little faith is enough to make things happen for the betterment of humanity? Why do we make faith so hard?

And we are quick to make excuses. We know that nations, tribes, gangs, ideologues kill each other for the love of money, power, revenge, violence and even for the love of God. The way to make any drop of difference at all seems to be to most of us impossible. But our God says "Blessed are the peacemakers". Ok God how do I increase my faith to do that?

Refugees and immigrants, displaced by terrorism and poverty, wander the earth and seas looking for safety, an open door, a compassionate welcome. The sheer numbers and depth of suffering and need are overwhelming; yet the fear of making space for them is like an insurmountable wall. And our God says "I was a stranger and you welcomed me." Ok God, how do I overcome my fear of the immigrant and stranger and welcome them so you got to increase my faith?"

Drug and alcohol abuse withers bodies and breaks relationships leading to despair, destitution, and sometimes terrible violence. The cycles of abuse seem to hold people captive with greater power than any treatment we can devise. But God says to us, "I give you power and authority to proclaim the Kingdom of God, and to heal." OK God how do I help myself let alone others without you increasing my faith!"

The depth and breadth of poverty and hunger not only in faraway places but right here in the United States is a shock and disgrace. And we wonder, "where will we get enough food to feed all these people and why can't they help themselves?" And God says, "bring your five loaves and two fish and feed the people." Ok God I've got to worry about feeding myself and my family so why can't they! So it's impossible that my faith can help me to do that without you increasing it?"

Our political and social context is marked by distrust, division, and demonization. We wonder and worry whether there can ever be reasoned debate, mutual respect, and a shared commitment to the common good. It is easy to feel powerless in so broken a system. And God says, "Love your enemies... pray for those who persecute you" and "Do to others as you would have them do to you." Ok God but how can we find

the common good when everyone is screaming at each other and the word compromise is seen as a sign of capitulation so please help me increase my faith!"

In the face of prejudice--racism, sexism, and every "ism" that plagues our society--in the face of the suffering and oppression that bigotry causes, we are tempted to nurture our grievances or try to ignore the realities. We grow weary and cynical of the struggle for justice and reconciliation. And God says to us, "love your neighbor" and "you must forgive." Ok God you really don't understand how hard that is so are you sure that's a part of faith? How can I do that without you increasing my faith!"

Now do you understand why the apostles cried out, "Lord, increase our faith"? Because what Jesus was teaching was difficult, because what Jesus was asking them and us to do felt overwhelming, because in light of the needs and challenges before them and us, they and we feet ill-equipped and under-qualified. The disciples of Jesus felt the weight of the world's brokenness as do we and wondered how the work would get done.

I think we can all relate to that. "Lord, increase my faith..." If only we had more faith we would be able to believe and if we could believe we'd have the courage to cope with whatever crisis is overwhelming us. If we could only believe, we'd be able to understand why, or how, this or that. If we could just believe strongly enough, we'd have the courage to risk, to speak out, to stand-up for, to open up to, to ask for, to go on, to do something. And what does Jesus reply? "If you had faith the size of the smallest seed..." you could do difficult things like move a tree and you could do even more impossible, seemingly absurd things like planting that tree in the ocean. It's not about proportion or a recipe or balancing how much is enough. Jesus' message remains: "You only need some faith-any faith, just a little faith!"

So how do we do that? What really is faith? Faith is to trust in God's promises of steadfast love, compassion, and restoration even in difficult, painful, and potentially risky circumstances. It is to lean into God's goodness, healing, justice, and mercy. Faith is to put that trust into action, to do what is asked by God, to do the hard thing, to risk disappointment and failure because you believe that God will see you through. Faith is a way of life. It is not about believing. Faith is about deep-seated confidence, about trust. Belief is more like an opinion. We can believe something to be true without it ever making any difference to us. Faith is trusting that there's a better way and embarking down that road. Faith has nothing to do with waiting around until you have all your ducks in a row. It is just taking off down that way, trusting that you'll find a way. You don't really need a whole lot of faith to change reality. Just a little dab' ill do ya!

I believe the invitation is for us to go forth and live in light of what we already see, sense, hear, and know. In other words, the invitation is to *do* faith. To do the loving, forgiving thing we consider so banal we ignore it. Why? Because the life of faith is really quite ordinary. Faith isn't fireworks; it's not meant to dazzle. Faith is simply recognizing our tiny place in relation to God's enormous, creative love, and then filling that place with our whole lives. In this sense faith is simply showing up when we're expected to show up. Faith is sustained by God's love.

Just like every disciple from the beginning, we have a choice to make. When we choose to "plug into" God's great love and compassion for us and for the world, we receive power. That power is not for the purpose of controlling things, lording over people, proving ourselves, or getting special treatment. We are given power to live and to love as

Jesus. And that means we live and love without expecting reward. It means having faith in God's love for us and what God can do in and through us even amidst all our faults and frailties. God has deemed all of us worthy to receive love, sacrifice, and the sacred responsibility to care for all the beauty and bounty of earth.

Here's one more story about birds. One year swallows heading toward southern Europe for the winter were faced with unusual cold. As they flew over Switzerland, many couldn't make it and fell to the ground. In a concerted effort, the whole of Switzerland mobilized. School children and others picked up the birds and brought them to the local airports and railway stations by car, train, even in cages strapped upon children's bikes. The birds were hand-fed on the ends of matchsticks, then flown by Swiss air to their destinations. One hundred thousand birds were saved.

If only we would show that same love and compassion to all of humankind. If only we used the faith we have we could accomplish so much. So our prayer is Lord, help us to realize to trust you more than we trust ourselves. Lord, help us to realize that our faith, however small it may be, is all that we need to finally know the true reward which is participation in the work of your saving love. Amen.