

Wesley United Methodist Church

October 2, 2016

“Prime the Pump.”

Luke 17:1-10

I love an old story called “The Legend of Desert Pete.” According to the story, a man was walking across a desert in the summer of 1933. He was dying of thirst and desperately needed water. Imagine his relief and delight when he came upon a pump, right out in the middle of the desert. There was a baking-soda can tied to the handle of the pump and inside was a note. The note read: “This pump is all right as of June 1932. I put a new sucker-washer into it and it ought to last five years. But the washer dries out and the pump needs to be primed. Under the white rock, I buried a bottle of water. It’s out of the sun and corked up. There’s enough water in it to prime the pump. So pour about one-fourth in it and let her soak the leather. Pour in the rest, and pump like crazy. You’ll get plenty of water to drink. The well has never run dry. Have faith. When you had enough water, refill the bottle and put it back under the rock for the next feller. (Signed) Desert Pete. P.S. Don’t go drinking up the water first! Prime the pump and you’ll get all the water you can hold.”

Desert Pete was right in calling people to have faith. But real faith is not confidence in a pump in the desert. Real faith is a total dependence on God and a willingness to do his will. Then we have to take a first step based on that faith. Faith is useless unless we are willing to act on it. This usually involves a bit of a risk. When we act on faith instead of fear, God’s grace and power are near.

Read Scripture: Luke 17:1-10

In verse three of this Scripture, Jesus shocked the disciples by giving a very difficult command. He said, “Even if your brother mistreats you seven times in a single day, and each time asks you for forgiveness, you must forgive him.” The disciples must have rolled their eyes in disbelief. They were folks just like us. They believed in “three strikes and you’re out.” Why give some misbehaving brother seven chances? They responded, “Before we can do that, we must have more faith. We’re at least a quart low.” But Jesus said to them, “You don’t need more faith; just use the faith you have. If you have faith the size of a mustard seed you can say to a huge mulberry tree, ‘Be moved,’ and it will move.

On another occasion a distraught father came to Jesus seeking healing for his epileptic son. “If it be possible,” said the father, “heal my son.” Jesus replied, “If it be possible? All things are possible to him who believes.” This very honest father responded, “I believe, help my unbelief.” (Mark 9:24)

The father was saying, “My faith is not the biggest in town. It sags in places. But I do have a little bit.” That was enough! Jesus healed his son.

Here is the lesson, friends. If you have even a tiny bit of faith in God, enough to take a first step as he leads you, that is enough to activate God’s grace and power.

When you drive north on Hwy 67 in Fremont County which is also called Phantom Road, you drive through the mountains toward Victor and Cripple Creek. You pass through a couple of small tunnels right through the side of the mountains. I’m always awed by the brilliance of the engineers who designed those tunnels. How were they carved out of the solid rock? I’m sure that dynamite was the key. Sticks of dynamite were well placed and then ignited by some sort of fuse. The fuse was necessary but it was not the source of power. The power came from the nitroglycerin in that dynamite. The fuse just ignited it.

Similarly, God’s power is like that dynamite that moves mountains. Our faith is just the fuse that ignites it. The size of the fuse doesn’t matter. Neither is the size of our faith a critical factor. Even a tiny bit of faith that we act on is enough to activate God’s power.

When we take our first step in faith, God works wonders. But how can we discern what the first step ought to be? Children are almost never in doubt about the first thing to do in any situation. They may not be right, but they are seldom in doubt. If you’re trying to decide the right first step to take in any situation, pray and ask a trusted Christian friend. When your friend’s suggestion matches up with what God is telling you, you’re on the right track.

Think about some challenge you face today. It could be a medical problem that seems to defy diagnosis. It could be a boss who is unreasonable and narrow-minded. It could be a teenager who is running with the wrong crowd. It could be a marriage that is deteriorating. It could be that your financial resources just can’t seem to cover your standard of living. It could be a grief or loss with which you are trying to cope.

Whatever the challenge, share it with God in prayer and perhaps with a trusted friend. God will not usually deliver to you a ten-point plan for completely solving the problem or dealing with the challenge. But God will show you a first step in faith that you can take. If you step out in faith and take that first step, God will then show you a step two and then step three. One step at a time, until the problem is resolved. That’s what it means to “walk by faith, not by sight.”

On the other hand, when faith is missing, God's mighty acts are limited. God himself is not limited, but he seems to have made much of his work contingent based on our faith. In Matthew 13:53-58, we have the story of Jesus returning to his hometown of Nazareth. Instead of welcoming Jesus home, the people of Nazareth took offense at him. The Bible offers this sad commentary: "And he did not do many miracles there because of their lack of faith." Without faith even God is limited. But when we have faith and act on it, we set the stage for God's mighty acts.

Just picture each of us in the desert, reading old Desert Pete's note. We're holding that bottle of water in our hands. We're mighty thirsty. Do we drink or prime the pump? In the final analysis, it's a matter of faith. Amen.