

Blessed be the Father, who alone is good; blessed be the Son, who reconnects us with the Father; and, blessed be the Holy Spirit, who is the Grace of the Son that dwells in us, Amen.

Recently, my new bride, Susan, and I had the privilege of experiencing our wedding here in this beautiful home of Jesus, St. Peter's by-the-Sea Episcopal Church. Many of our fellow parishioners (including many of you) made voluntary sacrifices to provide all the necessary amenities that allowed the reception and wedding to be the wonderful event that it was for which Susan and I are immensely grateful. These selfless acts of love will never be forgotten. I am quite certain Susan and I could not have pulled it off without your assistance. It is a true blessing to belong to a "faith community" such as we have here at St. Peters.

Our mission as a faith community (a portion of the Body of Christ) is listed on the front of your bulletins: "St. Peter's mission is to be a spiritually thriving household for people on their faith journey, radiating Christ's love by bearing witness to our community with hope, compassion, inclusion and service." We, collectively, are St. Peter's; so, this mission belongs to us all —"the Body of Christ has many members." By the grace of the Holy Spirit we are all given talents that lend themselves to the successful accomplishment of this mission. This is no small task thanks to the Evil One, who is constantly trying to steal away our focus from the Grace of Christ and the Church, to convince us that we need to focus on the "worries" of the world. Part of the Good News of Jesus Christ is that His grace dwells within us all; and, if we all had faith the size of a mustard seed that Evil One wouldn't stand a chance-he wouldn't even get in the Ring..

My goal as a follower of Christ is to grow my faith into the size of a mustard seed. Athletes strengthen their bodies through the perseverance of exercise and endurance training. Scholars gain knowledge by the perseverance of study, research, and lots of reading. We, as Christians, then, should be trying to think of how we can strengthen our ability to manifest (or reveal) the Grace that dwells, or abides in us. My theory is that grace begets faith and faith begets grace and the development of stronger faith is directly proportionate to the exercising of that faith through a process I like to refer to as Faithercise.

Ironically, the Evil One's incessant efforts to challenge our faith with doubt, worry, and focus on this world grant us-coincidentally-numerous

opportunities to Faithercise. As Christians, we have the advantage of knowing deep inside that nothing can separate us from the presence and love of Christ which dwells in us; Therefore, each time we are tempted by doubt, worry or fear we can remember our faith, and tell that Evil One, “Get thee behind me, Satan; you don’t stand a chance!” That doesn’t mean it’s going to be easy, or that we won’t have to endure a few counter-punches in the process. But, if we keep coming out of the corner swinging, that Evil One’s going down. Chances are good, though, that he’ll be back-which is just another opportunity for faith strength building-another opportunity to Faithercise.

The stronger our faith becomes, both individually, and collectively, the more we manifest to each other and the world the Grace-which is Christ-dwelling in us. Thereby, we grow more closely to the size of a mustard seed, and better fulfill our mission of being a spiritually thriving household for people on their faith journey, radiating Christ’s love by bearing witness to our community with hope, compassion, inclusion and service.

In today’s reading from Romans, Paul tells us “...suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.” So let’s keep suffering the fight against the Evil One every time we think of it and get the chance to Faithercise. Let’s keep working toward growing our faith into the size of a mustard seed, and better unleashing that Grace that abides in us, so that we individually and collectively as St Peters by the Sea, can better radiate Christ’s love to the world. Let’s get more people who don’t know about us to notice the gift of Grace that abides in us and St. Peter’s by the Sea Episcopal Church.

Truthfully, I don’t know that we’ll ever succeed in growing our faith into the size of a mustard seed. As the apostle Paul states in his letter to the Philippians “...Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but, I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me His own. Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do; forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.” Further, in the gospel of Matthew, Jesus explains the parable of the Sower as follows: ...”As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet such a

person has no root, but endures only for a while, and when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, that person immediately falls away. As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the lure of wealth choke the word, and it yields nothing. But as for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields...”

I am quite certain that none of us falls into the category of the seed sown among thorns; nonetheless, by strengthening our faith, by taking every possible chance to “Faithercise” we will be less like what was sown on rocky ground, and more like the seed sown good soil. That’s when we will bear fruit(or Grace) and yield (hopefully)more hearts to come to Jesus- ideally here at St. Peters.

So let’s keep Faithercising and growing closer to the size of that mustard seed, so that the Grace and the fruits of the Spirit, manifested in all of our respective gifts, may accomplish the mission of St. Peter’s by the Sea-and the mission of our leader and King, Jesus Christ, Amen.