

Wesley United Methodist Church

October 6, 2019

“Just a Little Faith Will Do.”

Luke 17:5-10

There is a hilarious story about Randy Johnson, a former quarterback for Oklahoma State University. Randy is the nephew of the late President Lyndon Johnson.

The year 1996 had not been a good year for Randy Johnson or the Oklahoma State team. And, to top it off, for the last game of the year, they faced the mighty Oklahoma Sooners. The game with the Sooners was almost over. The Cowboys of Oklahoma State were behind six points. They had the ball, but there was time for only one play. They were on their own twenty-yard line, eighty yards from the goal line.

The coach evidently thought the game was hopeless. He called time and put in all the seniors for the last play of the game so they could say they ended their college football career on the field. He told Randy to call any play he wanted, since in the coach's estimation, they had zero chance of scoring. To the surprise of the teammates, Randy called play 13. It was a trick play that had never been used before in a game. It had never been used for good reason—it had never worked in practice.

Well, the impossible happened! Play 13 worked! At the very last second, Oklahoma State scored! The fans went wild. As they carried Randy off the field, his coach asked him, “Why in the world did you ever call play 13?” Randy answered, “Well, we were in the huddle, and I looked over and saw old Harry with tears running down his cheeks. It was his last college game and we were losing. And I saw that big number 8 on his chest. Then I looked over and saw Ralph. And tears were running down his cheeks, too. And I saw that big number 7 on his jersey. So, in honor of those guys I added 8 and 7 together and called play 13!”

“But Randy,” the coach shouted, “8 & 7 don't add up to 13!” Randy reflected for a moment and answered with a smirk, “You're right, coach! And if I had been as smart as you are, we would have lost the game!”

I guess the moral of the story is that sometimes you need more than knowledge to win a football game. Knowledge will only take you so far. It would be great to have knowledge that will win us the game of life. I have enough problems in Bible studies trying to explain where Cain and Abel got their wives!

There is so much in the world that no one knows or understands. We are all somewhat like Albert Einstein's wife. Someone once asked her if she could make sense of her husband's theories. She replied that she understood the words, but not always the sentences.

And that is the position that each of us are in, too. No matter how brilliant, or well educated, or how insightful we may be, when it comes to making sense out of life, we can usually understand the words, but we don't always understand the sentences. There is much in this world we do not understand. And the situation is getting worse. Today, human knowledge is expanding so rapidly that no one can catch up with it.

So, let us give thanks to God that we are not saved by our knowledge. In 1 Corinthians 1:27, the apostle Paul writes, “God chose what in the world is foolish to put the wise to shame...”

We are not saved by what we know, for then only the most educated and knowledgeable among us could gain entrance into God's kingdom. We are saved, not by knowledge, but by faith. That's good news, isn't it? If we were saved by knowledge, many of us would be in trouble.

It is not knowledge that brings us to God, it is something that goes beyond our ability to comprehend with our gray matter. It is ultimately not our minds that are saved, but our souls. There is something deep within the human soul that cries out for God and will not be satisfied until it is in perfect union with the Creator.

But there is another thing we need to see. Just as we are not saved by the extent of our knowledge, we are also not saved by the level of our commitment. This may be a little more difficult for us to grasp.

We cannot buy our way into heaven with our good works. There is no sacrifice that is great enough to guarantee us the favor of God. There have been Christians throughout the history of the church who have failed to grasp this spiritual principle. It was not the publicans and the sinners who were the enemies of God, but those whose lifelong purpose was to lead good lives. That is what happens when people begin to believe that they are saved by their own perfection, their own hard work.

We are not saved by knowledge although knowledge is important. God gave us good minds for a reason. We are also not saved by our good works, although good works are certainly an important part of our lives as Christians.

So, what is it then that brings us into God's kingdom? Jesus said, “If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea.’ And it will obey you.”

We are saved by our faith. Just a tiny bit of faith will produce miracles. That's the Gospel. We can be saved by a mere cry like that of the wretched man in the Gospel of Mark 9:24, "Lord, I believe! Help my unbelief!" That's enough, just a simple "yes" to God. The mistake we often make is the assumption that faith must be of the spectacular variety in order to be valid. It is hard for us to grasp that just a little faith will do.

Jesus says that only a tiny measure of faith separates believers from unbelievers, but that tiny measure is enough. It would be nice if we could be people of complete and unquestioning faith, but that is hardly possible. We will always struggle with some doubt. That's human nature. However, even a little faith is enough to receive God's blessings.

It is not how much we believe in God that makes the difference for us. It is that God believes in us. God created us in his own image and gave his Son on our behalf. God's Son showed us the path that leads to abundant life in this world and beyond. And he gives a simple invitation: it is, "Follow Me." It is not through our knowledge, not through our commitment, that we will join the hosts of heaven, but simply by saying, "Yes, I will follow,"