

"FAITH TO MOVE MOUNTAINS"

TEXT: "For truly, I say to you, if you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move hence to yonder place' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you" (Matthew 17:20)

INTRODUCTION Jesus was a great genius in the art of faith. It's quite evident, as you read through the Gospel account, that He could do things with faith that most people cannot do; that He had more faith in God, more faith in faith, than any other person who has ever lived. We turn to Him as the great expert in the art of faith.

Most of you, I'm sure, are familiar with the story of the Transfiguration, when He took Peter, James and John and went up into a mountain, and was transfigured before them, so that "his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light". The spirits of Moses and Elijah appeared also, and from the cloud which overshadowed them came a voice which said, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him". The three disciples were frightened by this experience until Jesus came and touched them and told them not to be frightened.

FAITH "WORKS" Then, coming down from the experience on the mountain, there met them the father of an epileptic boy who begged our Lord to have mercy upon his son. He had brought the boy to the disciples but they had not been able to cure him. And Jesus, full of this great experience which had just come to him, full of an immense and intense faith, spoke sharply saying, "O faithless and perverse generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you?" Perhaps he directed this at the father, but it's more likely that he said it with his own disciples in mind. And then, shaking this sharpness from His countenance, He turned to the man as with a smile of gracious welcome and said: "Bring him here to me"

You'll recall that it was the belief then that epilepsy, and many other illnesses, were caused by evil spirits. According to the Gospel narrative, Jesus rebuked the evil spirit and the child was cured. The power, you see, that had been given on the mountain was needed the moment He came down from the mountain to help a helpless sick boy. The same power that had made the body of Jesus transparent with light made this diseased human body radiant with health and new life.

The disciples then proceeded to ask him why they had failed to cast out the evil spirit and Jesus said: "Because of your unbelief: for truly, I say to you, if you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move hence to yonder place' and it will move: and nothing will be impossible to you." Here is the faith of Jesus in action - living, triumphant, vital. And here one sees the vivid contrast between the inadequate faith of the disciples and the adequacy of the faith of Jesus. And here is that tremendous and reassuring word from Him about the faith that moves mountains!

UNBELIEF CUTS OFF POWER

Suppose we take these words of His and think about them together here this morning and apply them to our own lives. He said to his disciples "Because of your unbelief" - this is why they were not able to do what obviously should have been done and was done the moment Jesus appeared. We are his disciples, too. We, too, live in a world torn and twisted by devils of very kind, devils that we cannot manage and drive out, all kinds of situations, all kinds of human suffering, all kinds of sickness. We have our mountain top experiences - we come into our Lord's Presence in Church - and shortly after we come down from the mountain back into the valley of everyday living and there we encounter a world possessed by devils. We see the tragedy about us on all sides; we long to help and want to help, but so often we seem helpless. And we come to Jesus and say, "Lord, why is it that we cannot cast out this spirit of evil, of hatred, of intolerance, of injustice, of cruelty, of anger, of war?" And he levels with us and speaks the truth - "Because of your unbelief". None of us can escape that judgment. We know it's true. There is not one of us, no matter how much faith we have, no matter how long we have been "believers", no matter what works we may have been able to accomplish - there is not one of us who is not intimately and personally convicted by those words - "Because of your unbelief". Our unbelief - our closed-ness to God's full love and power, our unreadiness to spend and be spent as Christ was when He came from the mountain. This, it seems to me, is one of the world's great curses, the actual unbelief of those who are professed believers. And how we need to pray, "Lord, I believe: help thou mine unbelief."

"If only you have as much faith as a tiny grain of mustard seed, ye shall say to this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place, and it shall remove....."

"Ah....but this is all folly" says the skeptic. "Faith doesn't move mountains: dynamite and steam shovels are what move mountains, force and not faith is what moves them. Go to the engineers that built the Panama Canal, or to the engineers that have tunneled through the mountains of North America, and they will tell you how to move mountains". Some of the arguments about religion would never arise if everybody had a little bit more imagination and a bit more of a sense of humor. Jesus, you see, had just come down the slopes of an actual mountain. He had just seen the power of God banish a longstanding and grave human illness. And filled with the power of faith, He puts vividly its immense possibilities before them saying in his strong, Oriental way, "This mountain would blow away and be found in another place if only you had as much faith as is figured by a tiny grain of mustard seed."

A MOUNTAIN OF DIFFICULTY

Perhaps we shall not fully understand what He meant until we let Him move some of our personal mountains for us. For instance, here is a frail Negro boy, whose mother was sold as a slave - a sensitive, musical, whimsical boy with a great curiosity, balked at every turn to get an education. But that boy felt in his soul that he was meant to turn his personal curiosity about nature to the benefit of his people. And he believed in God. He ploughed through his difficulties one by one. He got his education, and became one of the great citizens of

this country, one of its outstanding practical scientists, and one of the great benefactors of his race. I doubt very much whether he could have done it without his faith, but by faith George Washington Carver removed, not only his own personal mountains but many a mountain of difficulty for his own people. His mountains were on the outside. Yours may be, too, - in the form of obstacles to be overcome, personal challenges to be met and mastered.

MOUNTAIN OF PRIDE

With many people, of course, their mountains are on the inside - within themselves. For instance, it may be a mountain of pride which makes them want to run everything they touch, turn every situation to their own advantage, always thirsting to be right, and their ego is the greatest thing about them. It stands between them and any true, effective relationship, any true success. What is it that can move a mountain of pride, or self-centeredness. Can hard knocks from the outside do it. Not always. Can a direct pursuit of humility do it. Seldom - because sometimes they become proud of their progress in humility. There is only one thing that can remove the mountain of pride - it is a sense of gratitude, a gratitude precisely of the kind induced in people when they find faith. Faith, a real faith, it seems to me, puts God at the center of things, faith puts God at the center of their lives.

MOUNTAIN OF FEAR

For some the mountain is a mountain of fear, or a mountain of sorrow. Someone we love is in great danger. We fear what the news may be in these next few hours or days. Or perhaps a message comes to us that wipes the sun out of the sky and sets up a throbbing and aching pain in our hearts. Can faith move such mountains. It can. We still hear his promise "If you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move hence to yonder place' and it will move". Does this mean stoicism, teaching or equipping ourselves not to stop caring? Not at all...far from it. It means the far more delicate and difficult solution of making us care all the more, but taking the personal hurt out by remembering the power of faith to transmute the meaning of personal sacrifice. That faith rests upon belief in the Sovereignty of God in His universe, upon the belief in the goodness of God, upon the belief that "All things work together for good to them that love God". That faith was sealed in the sacrifice of our Lord on Calvary, when He by faith changed forever the significance of the cross of shame, and made it the cross of our salvation for the world. When we lift up our own losses and sacrifices and bring them under the transforming power of His Cross, faith moves the mountain of fear, the mountain of sorrow.

IN CONCLUSION

"Nothing shall be impossible unto you" said Jesus. Nothing, that is, which is consistent with the will of God for us and for His world. We have a whole range of possibility within that majestic and wonderful will of God in which our faith can operate unhindered. A mountain looms up before. We do not see how we are going to surmount it or get around it. We do not see all the means available, but faith goes into action and slowly and surely that which seemed impossible becomes a reality.

And so as we go on from here, let us try to live more and more in the promises of our Lord and the chances are that if we do, we shall

do better in living by his commands. Let us remember that prayer is always faith active, faith persistent, faith growing. And remember, too, that the final leap of faith is not the letting in of belief, but rather of courage. We only believe because of sufficient evidence; we only stick to our beliefs and live them out because our wills move up quickly behind our minds and act courageously, and because our faith is the gift of God, we must constantly be coming back to God for fresh endowments of it through worship. Remember the words of him who is the great expert in the art of faith: "NOTHING SHALL BE IMPOSSIBLE TO YOU"

LET US PRAY: Help us to be conscious, Our Father, in these moments of thy presence. Help us to renew our spiritual energies. May we through faith, overcome the mountains that are in our lives - discouragements, pride, difficulty, fear, knowing that with thee all things are possible. Remembering Jesus, we ask this in his name. Amen