

Poppy Seeds and Ponderosas

Habakkuk 1:1-4; 2:1-4 + 2 Tim 1:1-14 + Luke 17:5-10

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In the name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

In 1986, Fr. Gregory Boyle became the pastor of Dolores Mission Church, the poorest Roman Catholic parish in Los Angeles that included the largest public housing projects west of the Mississippi. In a city called the gang capital of the world, the Dolores mission area had the highest concentration of gang activity. At the time, law enforcement tactics of suppression, and criminal justice policies of mass incarceration, were the prevailing means to deal with gang violence. The parishioners of Dolores Mission decided to start treating gang members like human beings instead and their little ministry evolved into the largest gang intervention, rehab and re-entry program in the world now called Homeboy Industries¹.

In 2011, I was sitting with an elderly woman in an assisted living residence in Nanaimo. She had just had both legs amputated and in her grief and frustration she looked at her where he legs used to be, looked and me and said: " Well, I know that Jesus loves me and now I just have to figure out what he wants me to do next!" And by using her wheel chair to visit those who were bedridden each and every day, Bettina found her own hope and helped many other to find theirs.

And it was in the early 1200s that the young Francis – who we remember today by blessing pets- put all his faith the God who called him, left his life of wealth and leisure and started begging in the streets preaching penance, love and peace. Today the Franciscans are one of the largest monastic orders.

This morning we receive part of Luke's Gospel in which the apostles- the 12 who were closest to Jesus, with him each day, the 12 who were sent out in his name, the 12 who you would think would have the most faith - ask Jesus to increase their faith. Jesus replies saying if they have faith the size of mustard seed they could tell a mulberry tree to uproot itself and toss itself in the sea. We might say: if you have faith the size of poppy seed you could tell a ponderosa pine to toss itself in the lake and it would. It's not about the amount of faith you have- that's a mentality that get us nowhere fast- it's about the God you have faith in. Scripture is full of imagines of tiny things becoming part of enormous ones likes seeds becoming trees, a yeast making an entire loaf of bread rise. And again and again in the gospels it's the people on the periphery -the sick, the disabled, the outcasts, the women, those who in comparison to the 12 apostles should have the least faith - they are made a part of God's great work of healing and restoring because it wasn't about how much faith they had but who they had faith in. We hear something similar in Paul's letter to Timothy today where Paul encourages Timothy in faith by saying " I know the one in

¹ <https://homeboyindustries.org/our-story/about-homeboy/>

whom I have put my trust... our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel." It's not about how much faith you have but the God you have faith in.

And so Jesus follows the story of the mustard seed with one about slaves or servants who don't expect to be thanked for what they do rather they just do what they were asked to do. The term 'worthless slaves' in this passage means those to whom nothing is owed leaving us to make the connection that God doesn't owe us anything. In our relationship with God, faith is never a bargaining tool or a payment for what we have done. We humbly do what we are called to do, Jesus teaches, because of the God who calls us.

Fr. Gregory Boyle, of Homeboy Industries in LA, says it this way. We are called "to see people as God does, with the highest, deepest reverence for the complexity of being human, for the truth of who we are....that we are God's delight and there is nothing you can do to alter that."²

We are God's delight and there is nothing we can do to alter that... we can just have faith in it. The God in whom we have faith loves us unconditionally, loved the world so much that God became human, came into all the we are- birth, life, death, - to bring us into all that God is. To know us, love us and heal us from the inside out so that we become agents of God's love, peace and justice for each other, a sign of the new creation God is working. It's a holy calling, says Paul, a good treasure entrusted to us that shapes our lives and action.

The Prophet Habakkuk heard God telling him to : "Write the vision; make it plain" so that even in the midst of violence, even though God seemed to be taking so long to show up, the people could live in faith. Write the vision and make it plain in the midst of Dolores Mission, in a care home, on the street, in the middle of Okanagan Mission: a vision of new life, a new way of being community together, of a God who will never let us go. We are each are called to make it plain through our own lives and we also do together every Sunday when we write it out, make it plain saying Christ has died, Christ risen, Christ will come again.

It's not about how much faith you have but the God you have faith in.

Amen.

² <https://homeboyindustries.org/> Video clip.