

Proper 22, Year C, Luke 17:5-10

Palmer Memorial Episcopal Church Oct. 2, 2016

The last couple of days I've been going to you tube to watch the latest Matthew McConaughey TV commercial for the Lincoln MKZ automobile. It's called 'Midnight'. It's a brilliant commercial, as commercials go, but I'm not watching it because I'm interested in buying a Lincoln. And even though I think Matthew McConaughey is a great actor, I'm not watching to watch him either. I've been watching it because it uses metaphor to describe what it's like to drive a Lincoln at midnight in the rain. That interests me because metaphor is the language Jesus likes to use and I saw in the commercial some metaphors I could use in this sermon.

When Jesus' disciples ask him to increase their faith Jesus replies, *"If you had faith the size of a mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it would obey you."*

A mustard seed is a very tiny thing indeed, about the size of the head of a pin. So Jesus seems to be implying that these disciples who are asking him for more faith don't have any. What the disciples don't seem to understand is that faith is not a thing. Jesus can't add to their faith because faith isn't a noun. It's a verb. Faith is a walk, a turn, a leap, a fall, a surrender.

Faith is like that Matthew McConaughey TV commercial. I'll describe it for you. At the beginning we see the actor from behind, clothed in a beautiful dark suit and shoes, walking out into the night through open glass doors. He walks right to

the edge of a swimming pool. We can hear crickets chirping. He Pauses. Looks around. Then slowly turns until his back is to the water. Suddenly the picture cuts to an image of a car speeding through a tunnel. Then there's a quick close up of the actor looking down and smiling a secret sort of smile. Then, almost in slow motion, with his back still towards the pool he bends his knees, throws his hands up into the air and leaps backwards into the water. Now there's a series of quick cuts: a sheet of water breaks against the car's windshield as it exits the tunnel, then the actor is being enveloped in the water where's he's just landed, finally we see the actor at the wheel of the car, then a last long shot of the car again, rain drenching it as it's driven down the highway and out of sight. The last thing we see on the screen are the words "It's Like That"

Faith is a walk to the edge, a look, a turn, a leap, a fall into a baptismal mystery that drowns you and, paradoxically, raises you, and moves you forward on a new road.

Have you ever witnessed someone taking that leap of faith, trusting God to do impossible things? This is a true story told by my friend, Cathy Richardson, a registered nurse. These are her words.

"Sometime around 1990 I was working in the Surgical ICU 7pm to am shift on a Saturday. We got a call that we'd be receiving a patient from the operating room sometime during the night. A woman riding a bike at the park was startled by a passing car and fell from her bike. Initially conscious, she insisted she was fine, with only a slight bump on her head. But her condition rapidly deteriorated in the

ambulance on the way to the hospital. When she arrived she was taken in for emergency surgery to stop bleeding deep within her brain from a skull fracture. Her condition was critical and her survival doubtful.

The woman's story began almost a year earlier when her husband, a refugee from Ukraine, found a church in Columbus, GA, that would help him bring his wife and daughter to the United States. They had been reunited for just a few months and she was now pregnant with their second child.

As the woman's husband waited, surrounded by his church family, a well-respected, skillful and somewhat arrogant neurosurgeon worked for hours to stop the bleeding, repair the fracture and limit the damage to the young woman's brain. We received her in the ICU at about midnight. She was breathing only by the work of a ventilator, her blood pressure was supported by several IV infusions, her pupils were dilated and not responding and she did not respond to any outside stimuli. The surgeon spoke with the husband as we settled the patient in the bed and tried to make her as presentable as possible for her husband's first visit. The surgeon told the husband to prepare for the worst, that, if she survived, she would probably have very little normal functioning of her brain or body and that he might consider organ donation if her brain function did not return. The husband, with great conviction, told the surgeon, "She will survive. God is with her and she will live. This happened to show you that God is in control."

When the husband came to see his wife, he went straight to the head of her bed and spoke softly into her ear with the same intensity with which he had spoken to the surgeon. He told her he loved her with his whole being, that he loved their daughter and the child growing within her, but that she had to give all of them up. She had to give all of her faith and her very life to God, to Jesus. He said, "No one else matters, nothing else matters, you must give it all up. Trust Jesus now. Trust Jesus to heal you."

He told her he had given her into God's care and that he believed God had a plan for his kingdom in the events of that day. The husband stayed by her side until morning. There had been no change in the woman's condition, so the husband decided to go home and get some rest. As he was leaving, a nurse came running to get him. His wife had opened her eyes. She was awake and aware and responding. Within three days she was out of intensive care and a week later she walked back into church with her family.

My friend Cathy adds that it was a truly miraculous recovery.

When Jesus walked to the cross, he walked in faith. He didn't have a script. He didn't know the ending. He walked to Jerusalem, he rode a donkey through the city, he ate a meal with his friends, he sang some hymns, he prayed hard, and he surrendered. He gave up. He trusted God. And he died. And then God did something truly miraculous. He raised Jesus from the dead. He gave him a new life, and in that life, he gave you a promise. If you walk in darkness, and turn in

hope, and leap into the baptismal waters with Jesus, you, too, will receive a new life, a new direction, a new way to live. Amen.