

Sermon—10th Sunday of Matthew
St George Orthodox Church—Albany, NY
Fr John Vazquez
8.13.23

MATTHEW 17.14-23

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit—one God—Amen!

Christ is in our midst!

Today we hear about Jesus coming down from the Mountain on which he was Transfigured.

We hear that he comes down and a man meets him who who has a boy that is demon possessed and he asks Jesus to cast the demon out because the disciples could not cast it out.

While Jesus was up on the mountain with Peter James and John the man came to the disciples and asked the disciples to cast this demon out.

Because we know that earlier in this gospel (ch 10) Jesus gave the disciples power to cast out demons and heal the sick

Well, the disciples could not cast this one out. There was something different about this kind. This kind was obstinate.

So Jesus tells the man—if you have faith I will cast it out. The man falls at Jesus' feet and cries out, "I believe Lord, help my unbelief" and with this small proclamation of faith Jesus casts out the demon

Later when the disciples are alone with Jesus they ask him, "why could we not cast it out?"

And Jesus says this amazing thing to them, he says, "if you have faith like a mustard seed you can move mountains"

We as disciples are told that if we have faith we can move mountains.

That we can do the impossible

There are so many stories I could tell you about someone doing the the impossible

I could tell you about Elijah and Elisha raising the dead through their faith—moving mountains

I could tell you about Abraham and Sarah having a child well past childbearing years through their faith—moving mountains

I could tell you about how Joseph went down into Egypt and went from a slave to Lord of all the land—moving mountains

But today I want to remind you about David and Goliath

David had this faith that Jesus speaks about

David was the youngest of his brothers—there were seven older brothers—and he was a shepherd

David's brothers were in the army and David's father Jesse tells him to go see how his brothers are doing and to bring provisions to them.

Well, Saul and his army were fighting against the Philistines and the Philistines had a huge giant named Goliath and Goliath created fear in all of the army because Goliath would come out every day and he would taunt the Israelite army. He would say—let one among you come and fight me—one on one—and let this decide the fate of the battle.

Everyone was scared of this challenge by Goliath and no one would go and fight him.

The Israelite army, led by Saul was cowering in fear, not knowing what to do

Well, David comes and he sees this and he is stunned

He says to his brothers, “how can you let this happen—this is the army of the Lord. The Lord will deliver him into your hands. I will go and fight him.”

David's brothers say—be quiet, you don't know what you are talking about!

And the other soldiers, including the king, are astonished. “How can this young boy go and fight this giant, he will get torn to pieces”

But David is allowed to go. At first Saul tries to give him his armor but it won't fit David and David leaves it behind and goes to fight the Giant with nothing but his sling.

As David goes down he picks up 5 smooth stones from the brook.

So you could say that David had a mountain before him. He had to go fight this giant but when everyone else thought the task impossible David had faith that God would be with him and grant him the victory.

When Goliath sees David he says—am I a dog that you send this boy to me!?

David says—you come at me with sword and spear but I come to you in the name of the Lord God of Israel.

So David takes one of the stones and slings it at Goliath and it strikes him right between the eyes. Goliath falls down and David comes to him takes Goliath's sword and finishes the job.

These stories we hear in the Old Testament are true and we see in the new testament the spiritual meaning behind these stories

Sometimes it can seem that we face a task or a barrier that is insurmountable

What are we to do in the face of such a mountain—such a giant?

Do we cower in fear?

No, we exercise our faith because if we do not...

If we do not, things will not go well for us in this life or the next

We don't like to hear this but it is the case

We need faith to live—to have life with God

And our Lord gives us two ways today that we can increase our faith

He tells us that through prayer and fasting we can establish our faith and increase our faith and move mountains

We are both physical and spiritual—we have a body and a spirit

So our Lord gives us a physical tool—fasting—and a spiritual tool—prayer—to increase our faith

He gives us fasting for our bodies so that we can turn to God with our bodies

It turns out that in the Church we fast for about half of the year

We fast on Wednesday's and Friday's, we fast during this time now—the Dormition fast, we fast before Christmas for 40 days, we fast during Lent, Holy Week is its own thing and then there is the apostles fast.

And fasting can be done in different ways

It can mean eating no food

It can mean eating no animal products

And it can mean controlling you portions

We are not called to fast like monks—eating nothing and just having a egg on pascha

This is not what we are called to

We are simply called to fast a little so that we can turn our attention to God

So that we can say—with our bodies—It is You my Lord that I desire, help me!

And this fasting is an expression of faith, it increases our faith

And remember all we need to be able to say is—Lord I believe, help my unbelief!—and we will be able to move mountains and defeat Giants

Then there is prayer

Prayer is the way that our Lord tells us we can increase our faith spiritually

In prayer, I admit that I need help

I go outside of myself and say—Lord help me.

In this way prayer establishes a relationship with God

I am not just caught up with myself when I pray but I reach outside of myself to my Lord and God

St Paul tells us that we are to pray without ceasing

How do we do such a thing?

We begin by prayer when we wake up—Lord thank you for bringing me through the night

We pray before we go somewhere—Lord protect me as I travel

We pray before we eat—Lord thank you for this food

We pray before we do anything—Lord help me to do this well

We pray before we talk with someone—Lord bless my words, help me to speak truth and speak with love

We pray before we go to sleep—Lord thank you for bringing me through this day, have mercy on me as I sleep

In other words we are constantly in communion with God—not so that we can get what we want but so that we can have a relationship with him and grow in our faith so that we can life

Because Christ is Life

So our Lord gives us these two tools, prayer and fasting, to give birth to faith, to establish our faith, to grow our faith

And with this faith we can move mountains and face giants

You know, right now our community is facing one of these mountains, one of these giants

It is not a secret

We are not doing well, how are we going to survive, where will the money come from

What should we do?

We have the beginning of our answer today

We pray and fast so that we can grow in faith

And remember, all we need is this little grain of mustard seed, all we need to be able to say is—Lord I believe, help my unbelief!

And we can defeat this giant and move this mountain

We do these things together—as a community—and we become stronger and we establish that connection with our Lord and he will hear us.

May God, strengthen us and have mercy on us and establish faith in us. Amen!