



GOSPEL GOSSIP

The disciples asked Jesus,
'Increase our faith.'

St Luke 17. 5-10

Sunday 5 October

Although Harvest Thanksgiving will be observed this Sunday, this week's Gospel Gossip follows the continuous readings of St Luke's gospel set for today.

It's not what you've got, it's what you do with it! In this gospel passage, the disciples didn't so much ask as demand that Jesus increase their faith. Perfectly understandable you might think. Surely it would be in Jesus' (and therefore God's) best interest that those who follow him have plenty of faith? But not surprisingly, the answer they were given is not what they, and perhaps we, might have expected. Jesus says that even a tiny amount of faith – as small as a mustard seed – is all that they need. Jesus lets it be known that faith is not something that can be given out to individuals on request, but something which is given to all, through grace, and it's what is done with it that really matters.

- How often have you felt that your faith is not strong enough?
- If you have, what effect has that had on you – positive or negative?
- Are you envious of others' faith?
- Is something given or earned?
- What is the purpose of faith?

In the baptism service, it is stated that 'faith is the gift of God'. All God's gifts are given not as favours to the individual, but to all, equally. God gives us the gift of faith so that we might live our lives more effectively as followers of Jesus. At baptism, we are re-born as people of faith, into a community of faith – the Church, the body of Christ. As members of the body of Christ, we are called to continue Christ's ministry here on earth, proclaiming liberty to the captive, freedom to the oppressed and justice and equality for all.

- Do you talk about your faith with others? If not, why not?
- Are you embarrassed when others want to tell you about their faith?
- Can you live faith-full lives on your own?
- How can you grow in faith?
- Does faith effect the way you live?

Many people are not comfortable with talking about their faith. Partly it's due to natural reticence. Or else it's frowned upon – religion, sex and politics are taboo subjects for polite conversation. Or else it's a matter of embarrassment; overawed by others' seeming superiority and an unwillingness to talk about one's own. We need to remember that faith is caught not taught. Faith will never increase if those who have even the tiniest amount keep it tightly buttoned up. Not that we should be standing on a soapbox or using social media to explain it to all and sundry. That usually leads to dismissal and ridicule. Our faith is demonstrated by the way we live. Faith removes doubt, anxiety and fear. Even if we only consider that we have a mustard-seed amount of faith, that is enough to break down those barriers that constrain us, and hinder our achieving true happiness and fulfilment. We are given faith by God, but it is up to us what we do with it. We are responsible for its nurture and its increase. We can consolidate and increase our faith through prayer, by receiving God's word and sacraments, by being an active member of the worshipping community, by being the body of Christ. The disciples shouldn't have asked Jesus to increase their faith – they should have worked on it themselves, as indeed so should we.