

## The Reverend Marjo Anderson

Pentecost 6  
Mark 6:1-13

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### “The Power of Faith”

Jesus has been going all around the country,  
preaching, teaching, healing, and performing miracles.  
Then he returns home and on the Sabbath teaches in his home synagogue.  
At first his friends and family are amazed, but almost immediately resistance sets in.  
Who did this guy think he was? What gave him the right to teach them?  
He wasn't any better than them!  
And the resistance turns into offense.

Obviously his disciples are taken aback  
by this unusual negative response to their superstar rabbi.  
But Jesus explains that he's not surprised.  
The farther from home you travel,  
the more brilliant you are, the more credibility you have, and the more people listen.  
Back at home you are always the person from the past that people remember you were  
and there's no openness to who you are now.  
They think they know you and so their expectations are set  
and they are unable to see anything outside of those expectations.  
And because they can't see or hear anything outside of their expectations,  
they can't receive what is being offered; they can't receive the new insights;  
they can't receive the healing; they can't receive the signs & wonders & miracles.  
And so most of them leave unchanged, unfulfilled, unfed.

And Jesus makes it clear that he can't heal you if you don't have faith.  
He can't change your heart unless you invite him to do so.  
He can't give you what you need unless you believe he can.

I must have heard the words “faith” and “belief” a million times growing up in the church.  
But faith and belief for me meant intellectual assent to certain theological propositions.  
That's what the creed is, after all.

It draws a picture of who God; it defines God; it describes God.  
And if you think that picture, that definition, that description is accurate,  
you say, “I believe”.

Now I do remember my confirmation teacher talking about faith. He explained it this way.  
He pulled out a chair and said, “If I ask you to sit down on this chair,  
it doesn't take faith for you to do it, because you can see it.  
But if I blindfold you and asked you to sit on it, you would need faith to act  
because you can't see.”  
So faith is about trusting when we cannot see.

But as human beings we have trouble trusting God.

We'd much rather trust ourselves, trust our bank accounts, trust in what we know and can see.  
And because we have trouble trusting God, we tend to be modest in our prayer requests  
because we don't want to be disappointed.

We pray, "Dear God, I would really like to get that new job", but we don't leave it at that.  
There's a part of us that right away jumps to,  
"but if you don't want me to have that job, that's ok, because you know best."

Now I'm not disputing either half of that prayer.  
It's fine to ask God for anything and we always should yield to God's will.

But the problem with that prayer is that there is no space for faith in it.  
For the prayer to be one of faith, it needs to go something like this:

"Dear God, I would really like that job  
and I am praying for it  
and I am believing that you want it for me  
and I am trusting that you will give it to me.  
I am trusting you because I know you love me and want me to have an abundant life."

And that's where you leave the prayer.

You keep on believing that God is going to give you that job;  
you see yourself in that job;  
you give thanks to God for the job that you know he's going to give you;  
you imagine telling everyone how God answered that prayer.

That's where you leave it – that's where you live with it – in that space of faith;  
and you stay in that space of faith unless and until you find out that you didn't get that job.

It's only at that point when you find out you didn't get the job  
that you go back to God and submit your will to God's, by praying something like this:

"God, you know that I really wanted that job  
and that I really thought that you were going to give it to me.  
It didn't work out but I am still trusting you.  
I am believing that there was a reason that I didn't get that job.  
I am believing that it's because you have something better in mind for me.  
And so I accept that you have closed that door  
and I wait in faith for the next door to be opened.  
Thank you, God. Thank you."

I didn't learn about that kind of faith in church.

I learned it from a New Age book called The Secret,

a book that explains that our thoughts and words and actions have creative power.  
Any time we visualize something, any time we voice a wish or a hope or a prayer,  
anytime we speak our desires,  
we are putting ourselves on the frequency to receive those things.

After reading this book I realized that these New Age followers had more faith in the Universe than I had in God!

I realized the power of God,

the One who spoke creation into being & the One who created us in the image of the Creator, created us to do what the Creator does - to think and speak creation into being.

After reading this book I realized that it was saying the same thing that the Bible teaches!

It talked about the words I AM – the name of God – being a creative force.

If I say, “I am tired”, then I’m going to feel more tired.

If I say, “I am getting sick”, then I’m going to get sick.

If I say, “I am so mad!” then I’m just going to get angrier.

But if I say and believe, “I am healthy”, then it’s likely I’m going to be healthy.

If I say and believe, “I am going to get that job!” then I will likely get that job.

If I say and believe, “I am so grateful”,

I will bring more things into my life for which I will feel grateful.

After reading that book I understood that

when the Bible says that faith can move mountains, it really can!

When it says, “Whatever you ask in my name shall be yours”, that it’s true.

When Jesus says we can do greater things than he, he means it.

Now I know all of this, but I’m a human being, and I forget, I backslide, I stray.

And this week I was having a crisis of faith.

God spoke to me a year or two ago and told me about something that would happen in my life.

It seemed I was on the right path to reach that promise.

But then at least half a dozen times obstacles appeared in the road

that made me doubt that I had heard correctly.

But each and every time I doubted,

God responded by doing something miraculous to confirm what had been said originally.

Lately, however, it’s not just been an obstacle in the road;

it’s more like a flood came and washed away the entire road

and there doesn’t seem to be any way to get from here to there

And so I lost faith.

I wrote a psalm of lament.

I poured out my fear and doubt, my pain and grief, my grumbling and complaining.

Then suddenly I remembered that what I was saying would bring those very things into my life.

Every fear I expressed, every doubt I voiced, had the creative power

to make those fears and doubts manifest in the real world and not just in my mind.

I was on the grumbling and complaining channel,

and would only receive more things about which to grumble and complain.

So I took that psalm of lament and I rewrote it into a psalm of hope.

I had no sooner finished when I got a message,

a sign that said that God was listening

and that I should continue to have faith

and hold on to God’s original promise.

Every thought and feeling that you have and every word that you speak  
has a creative force that will manifest whatever you are thinking and feeling and speaking  
into reality.

If we don't expect that Jesus will answer our prayers, fulfill our desires, grant us our dreams,  
then Jesus cannot do those things.

But if we believe, if we have faith, if we trust,  
then we make ourselves available to receive what God has to give.

You and I need to hold each other accountable for our words and actions.  
If one of us complains or grumbles or speaks negativity into the atmosphere  
then someone needs to remind us  
that that's going to bring exactly what we don't want to pass.

We need to think and feel and speak and believe and have faith and hold onto the vision  
of what it is that we desire.

We need to speak of the things that we want and not of the things that we don't want.  
We need to give thanks for what God has given instead of complaining about any lack we feel.  
We need to believe that our God is a God who can do anything.  
We need to believe that our God is a God who loves us enough to want to answer our prayers.  
We need to pray for what we want and we need to live in that space of faith.

When things don't go the way we would like them to go, we need to say,

“God, what is it that you're trying to tell us?

What is it that we're supposed to learn?

What is it that you would have us do?

Because, God, we will do it, as we hold on to the vision that you've shown us,  
the promise that you've given us,  
the desires that you've placed within our hearts.”

Having faith means living in that space of faith, that space and time  
between asking and receiving an answer to our prayers, with absolute trust and faith.  
it's like living in a magical place where anything can happen.

Stay in that space, encourage one another, and fix your mind on the best that is yet to come.  
Whatever it is in your life that you long for, believe that you can have it,  
because as long as you can believe that you can have it, then it remains a possibility.

Jesus is here. We've known him all our lives.

Have we already decided that he can't do any miracles here?

Have we already decided that he's not going to do anything outside of our expectations?

Have we already decided that he doesn't have much more power than we do?

Or are we going to believe

that Jesus can heal, that Jesus can set free, that Jesus can satisfy our deepest longings?

Are we going to open our hearts and minds and spirits

in a way that will allow Jesus to do the unexpected? I hope so.

I want to live in that space of faith believing that it's God's greatest desire  
to satisfy the longings of our hearts, to help us reach our full potential,

& to lead us into life abundant. How about you? How 'bout we live in it together? **Amen**