

“You’ve Got To Have Faith”
Laitry Sunday Sermon – October 27, 2019

When I was first asked to give this sermon I thought, why me? What could I possibly have to say that someone else would want to hear? Who really wants to hear me talk about anything for any length of time let alone in front of a congregation from a pulpit? I didn’t even have an idea what to talk about. I asked a few people if they had any thoughts and each one told me to speak from the heart. Speak from the heart? How? At this point in my life my heart is fully intact. It’s not what others would define as broken or fractured. I haven’t had a “hard life”. My wonderfully supportive parents are still very happily married and very much a part of my everyday. I am married to a great person who loves me unconditionally and we have 3 beautiful children. I’ve never really “struggled” (at least to the outside world), so why would anyone want to hear from me? Then, like a bolt of lightning (also known as Devine Intervention), I realized I had a lot to share about a topic that I have struggled with for as long as I could remember. Something I am sure every single one of you can relate to as well.

Before I get into that (because who doesn’t like being kept in suspense!), let me tell you a little bit about myself! For those that don’t really know me, I am a third generation member of this church. My grandparents, Ken & Madeline Ormsbee, started attending back in 1960, when it was still the little white church on the hill. If you look around, you will still see pieces of my grandparents in various places throughout this church. They were very much a part of this congregation and the congregation was very much a part of them. My mother and my uncle were raised in this church, participating in almost every activity they could, from Sunday school to youth group, and everything in between. When she was old enough, my mom even became confirmed in this church and is still an active member of many groups and committees to this day. (Hi, Mom!) My parents were even married in this church. Once my brother and I came

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along in the early 80’s we were weekly fixtures here as well. Many of you have known me since forever and have watched me grow up over the past 30+ years. I have very fond memories of my mom being my Sunday School teacher in the “little room” and then moving on to the “big rooms” as I got older. My Sunday nights were spent at youth group activities and spending time with the “Kindness Company” (which was the name of the theater group back in the day). Once I was old enough, I sat with Pastor Jeff and many other youth my age in confirmation class, learning about the morals and ideas behind all the great Bible stories I had heard when I was younger. I made my confirmation when I was 16 years old. I spent many summers at Camp Aldersgate, a Methodist based camp on Swartswood Lake. I attended SEARCH for many years, even becoming a youth leader as I got older. And while I left the Methodist church for a little while, I always carried Parsippany UMC in my heart. I don’t tell you all of this to brag about myself or the length of time my family has been a part of this church. I shared my history with you to explain that there was never a time where THIS church and THIS congregation were not a part of who I was. Who I am. That doesn’t mean however, that I could say the same about my faith.

Faith is a funny word. Depending on who defines it, it could mean several different things. Is it something we have? Is it something we give? Is it something we believe? Pastor Jeff, actually, did a whole sermon on it a few weeks ago where he describes the one word of “Faith” as being connected to three different concepts: trust, persistence, and obedience. For those that missed it, like myself, (Side note: Thank you to those wonderful people who post written copies of the sermon on the PUMC website so those that missed the live version to catch up!), Pastor Jeff summed up faith as trusting that God loves us and wants only good for us, persisting

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on the journey of life, even when the road is rough and the path dimly lit, and finally the willingness to do God’s will. He even mentioned that all you need is to have faith the size of a mustard seed and you can move a mulberry tree. In fact, Jesus uses the mustard seed parable quite often throughout His teachings. Have you ever actually seen a mustard seed? It’s about 1 millimeter in length. Pretty tiny in the grand scheme of things. In Matthew 17:20 it states, “if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you can tell this mountain, “move from here to there’ and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.” Pretty profound, huh? Especially the part about moving mountains! And doing all of that by only having a little bit of faith? Should be easy to conjure enough trust, persistence and obedience to equal that of a mustard seed, right? Except when it’s not. Except when that mountain you’re trying to move feels like it’s the size of Mount Everest and you don’t even have 1 millimeter of faith to make it through your mountain. Then what? How do you feel the love of God when you feel like he’s abandoned you? Having faith even in your most darkest of hours is quite possibly the hardest thing you will ever have to do. And I know in that moment it sounds almost impossible. I know, because I’ve been there, too.

Remember when I mentioned that I’ve never really struggled, at least to the outside world? The key to that statement is “the outside world”. Internally, I feel like I am a big ol’ mess, and have felt that way most of my life. As I mentioned previously, I was raised in this church so you would think having faith would come easily to me. I’ve heard about Jesus’ teachings my whole life and how just a little bit of faith can do amazing things. It was really hard to remember when I was at my darkest points, however. My earliest memory of struggling with my faith is when I was about 14 years old. My very best friend Renee had moved away, I was

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getting ready to start high school, I was overweight, felt pretty ugly, had a very negative self image about myself and everything just felt like it was just “THE WORST”. I had been bullied in school because of my weight, but I was okay with it because I had my best friend by my side, but now she was gone and I wasn’t as confident that I could ignore my bullies. Plus, all my other friends had started dating and I hadn’t even held a boy’s hand yet! It was horrible! Looking back on it now, that was probably the easiest struggle I had to overcome, but at the time it felt like my life was ending (Cue dramatic teenage angst). My grandmother, in her most loving and supportive voice, told me to “buck up and get over it. God saw me and would walk with me when I needed him”. I was horrified! Didn’t she understand my life was completely over? There was no way God would ever torture me like this and allow my best friend to move away and leave me to attend high school with no best friend and no boyfriend! If He really existed, He wouldn’t have been so cruel! There was no way I could do this! She then explained to me the story of the footprints in the sand and how at the hardest times in our lives, God actually carries us down the path so we don’t have to walk alone. At other times, he places people on our path to help us walk down it. Either way, I wasn’t alone! Still totally disbelieving her and feeling like I was completely by myself, I started my very first day of high school with no best friend, and no boyfriend. My first couple classes were long and lonely. Sure, I had people who I could talk to but no one that I could count on unconditionally. Then I started band class and met a funny guy who really seemed to be interested in me. We struck up a pretty good friendship, but (sad for me) he was dating someone else and seemed to really like her so I felt like I had no chance. Still, we had a great friendship and, over time, we became pretty close. After awhile he broke up with that girl and we became even closer. Finally, in May of 1998 that boy, who had slowly

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become my best friend, asked me to be his girlfriend. As with all teenage love, the grass was greener, the birds chirped louder and the flowers smelled better! I was walking on a cloud! Maybe my grandmother was right! Maybe God does put people on your path when you least expect it! My faith was restored and all was right with my world! My self-confidence soared because he made me feel like I was the prettiest person in the world! We dated for about 2 years before he shattered my heart and told me he had enlisted in the Navy and signed a 6 year contract. 6 years is an eternity when you’re a 17 year old! Couple that with the fact that all of my so-called friends that I had cultivated over the previous 2 years all decided that I was not worth being friends with anymore and my faith in God was crushed. How could someone who I’ve been taught to believe only had my best interest at heart take away my best friend yet again? And right before my senior year of high school?!?!? It was just cruel! All of the feelings I had felt prior to Scott and I dating had resurfaced in full force! I felt worthless, unloved.....then nothing, which really is the most dangerous feeling of all. While I never actually acted on them, thoughts of not existing anymore passed through my mind. Clearly no one wanted me around anyway so why continue living? I didn’t share my feelings with anyone. Not even my mom. It was the darkest point I had ever experienced up until that point and I had no idea had to overcome it. Sure I put on a happy face for everyone around me, but I was empty inside.

Scott left two days after my 18th birthday. I rebelled by getting my first tattoo (something my dad absolutely hated!). I figured if I could at least feel the pain of the tattoo, it meant I was still breathing. Shortly after, I attended my first ever SEARCH retreat. I didn’t want to go. I had lost all of my faith in God and my religion and had absolutely no desire to be around

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“God people”. My mom, however, encouraged me to go, stating it was just what I needed at that point in my life. Man, it pains me to admit this out loud, but she was right! That weekend was all about finding faith in the darkest of places. Even when you couldn’t see it, it was there! In fact, that weekend was when I had heard the parable about the mustard seed and the mountain for the first time! I met with other kids my age who had travelled down very dark paths, much darker than mine, and still managed to maintain that mustard seed of faith. If they could do it, so could I! I just had to trust that God was with me on my journey, and when I couldn’t walk it by myself, He was there to carry me! 3 days, was all it took to renew my faith in Jesus.

I carried that weekend with me for many years. Yes, there were low times, but I had my mustard seed of faith and I moved the mountains that were in my way. Scott asked me to marry him in May of 2001 and we were wed in May of 2003. We moved to Virginia where he to be stationed for the next 4 years. While I hated leaving everything behind that I knew and was comfortable with, I had my faith and was ready to face my next adventure. I trusted I would persevere. Then in March of 2006, a mountain was placed in my way that I wasn’t sure I could overcome. See, about 18 months early my wonderful beloved grandmother had passed away. The same grandmother that brought her family to this church in 1960, the same grandmother who introduced my favorite poem about footprints in the sand. She had been my pillar of faith my whole life and she was gone. It was her time to go, but it still hurt none the less and my heart was slightly fractured. Not long after her death Scott was deployed and I was left by myself again so my heart never really had time to heal from the loss. It was torn completely that March of 2006 by three little words “I have cancer”. My mom, the strongest, most

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courageous person I knew, was facing her own mountain and I was hundreds of miles away. I immediately reverted to the way I had felt prior to Scott leaving for boot camp. For the third time in my life, God was trying to take away my best friend! How could I whole-heartedly believe in something that was constantly trying to break my heart! Then my mom, who had no idea how profound I felt the bible verse was, presented me with a small box that she had been given by someone who had been aware of her challenges. She handed it to me and told me that it may seem impossible, but this box would be the answers to my struggles and she would explain once I opened it. Completely distrusting that a tiny little box could solve all of my problems, I opened it warily. Inside the box, was a single, and very tiny mustard seed. She then proceeded to tell me about Matthew 17:20 (having no idea that it was already a favorite of mine) and explained that it may be a very huge mountain she has to climb and I may feel helpless because I can’t climb the mountain with her, but we both just need to have a little bit of faith and we can make it through! Talk about Divine Intervention! Somehow, yet again, God placed that little tiny millimeter of a seed right where I needed to see it.

Thankfully, my mom entered remission, Scott finished his active duty service and we moved home to be closer to everyone. It was a great time for Scott and I to finally start our family! How hard could that be? People get pregnant all the time without even trying! Even we had gotten pregnant without even really trying to early in our marriage. While it had ended in a miscarriage, we figured when we were ready to have a child, it would be easy! Hahahahahaha! Not so much! We couldn’t get pregnant on our own so we turned to fertility treatments. After several failed IUIs , we tried IVF. We got pregnant on our first try and found out we were having twins! We were over the moon excited! Everything was looking good for the first few weeks.

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Then when I was about 6 weeks pregnant, they couldn’t find a heart beat on one of them, but the other was going strong! We mourned the loss of another child but rejoiced knowing we still had one healthy baby! Then at my 9 week mark, when I was released to my regular OB, I had another routine ultrasound where the second baby’s heart had stopped beating as well. We had lost both of our children in the span of 9 weeks. If I thought I was in the darkness after Scott enlisted, that was nothing compared to the feeling of utter devastation after losing the twins. I didn’t want to be around anyone. I was so completely lost in my own darkness that even a mustard seed of faith was impossible to find. I. WAS. BROKEN. While still absolutely emotionally, mentally, and, in a lot of ways, physically destroyed, my sister-in-law shared the amazing news that she was pregnant. Talk about what felt like a direct slap in the face by God Himself! Clearly there was no God because if there was how would He cause me so much pain and anguish over not being able to have a child while allowing my sister-in-law complete joy of becoming a mom for the second time? My faith, my trust in God, my perseverance, my ability to obey, my heart, all of it was shattered. Yet, I had to put on my happiest face and share in the joy of my sister-in-law’s news because that’s what had to be done. That was the darkest time in my life. I thought about ending it all. No more pain, no more heart ache, no more feelings at all.

One night I went to bed and made one last prayer to God. I asked him to prove he really existed by taking me to join him in heaven. I had heard all the Bible stories about how heaven was this wonderful place full of no pain or grief. No sorrow or sadness. Nothing of the desolation I was feeling at that moment. He did one better and gave me the life altering dream that allowed me to restore my faith. My grandmother came to me in a dream and told me I had to keep going, that my time was coming to conquer my mountain. I should add here that I had

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never had a relative visit me in a dream before, and I have never had one visit me since. She reminded about our talk way back before I started high school and reminded me that, even though I didn’t feel it, I was being carried by God until I could stand on my own two feet again. I woke up with a profound peace over me. While I was still in grief over the loss of my twins, I knew we needed to try again. I had to trust that God had me in his sights and my time was coming. Maybe not on my timeline, but I just had to have faith, even if it was only as small as a mustard seed. The day my nephew was born, I found out we were expecting again after another successful round of IVF. 6 weeks after that we found out we were having triplets! 3 babies when all I prayed for was one! I guess God really does answer prayers, and have a wicked sense of humor to boot! While it wasn’t the easiest pregnancy in the world, and there were some very scary moments early on, I never lost my trust that I was following God’s plan. He had proven to me in many ways over the years that I had to trust that He loves me, persist on my path, and obey his will. It’s not always easy and there are many times that the darkness inside looks very inviting. But then I look in the face of my miracle children and I just have to keep my faith, even a mustard seed amount, and keep moving forward. We all have mountains we will need to move along the path of life. Some will be big, some will be small, some will seem impossible to move. You just need to remember your mustard seed and you will preserve. I leave you with my favorite quote from a very wise author: “You’re off to Great Places! Today is your day! Your mountain is waiting, so get on your way!” Words to live by from none other than Dr. Seuss!