Pray

Have you ever felt like an imposter? A phony, a fraud, like you just didn’t have what you needed to do a job, to be a good friend, to take on a new opportunity? Or just maybe have you ever sat in church looked around and thought… I am not so sure I belong here?

WebMD defines Imposter Syndrome this way… “when you doubt your own skills and successes. You feel you're not as talented or worthy as others believe, and you're scared that one day, people will realize that.” Although it's not a [mental health](https://www.webmd.com/mental-health/mental-health-types-illness) diagnosis, [imposter syndrome](https://www.webmd.com/balance/what-is-imposter-syndrome) can cause real harm in different areas of your life.” The author goes on to say that according to one study 82% of all people have felt like an imposter.

I wonder if the disciples ever felt this way. If imposter syndrome drove them to ask, “Increase our faith.” Jesus is telling the disciples that they must hold one another accountable. That they must ask for repentance and extend forgiveness as many as seven times in a day! Note the biblical authors treat seven, a nice prime number, as a perfect or complete number. Jesus isn’t bad at baseball and saying, “Seven strikes you’re out.” He is teaching that repentance and forgiveness is a continual act. Jesus is letting them and us know what it takes to be in community, partnership, ministry together for the sake of the Gospel.

Isn’t it striking that they don’t ask for more faith when called to leave family, possessions and go traveling on dangerous roads following a radical teacher. They ask for more faith when Jesus says relationships require give and take, that being in community takes vulnerability, sacrifice, and grace. Hearing this is what that leads the disciples say, “whoa, whoa, whoa. Not so fast Jesus, we are going to need help with that one. Increase our faith.”

Yet, who can blame the disciples. Look at political discourse in our country and you won’t see many leaders’ modeling repentance and forgiveness. Jesus’ teaching is certainly ignored in the comment section of any and every social media page. How many of us in our own personal lives would rather not admit when we are wrong, seek to avoid conflict, and would rather cut folks off then practice forgiveness and mercy?

Now to be fair Jesus uses familial language in his teaching, he certainly never imagined Facebook. I also don’t believe Jesus is encouraging folks to be in toxic or abusive relationships. He is talking about connections where mutual accountability is possible. Yet, even if we extend this teaching to this community and our personal relationships… we might still feel the same as the disciples, “increase our faith.”

To them and us Jesus says faith the size of a mustard seed can, with just words uproot and replant a tree. I hear this and think cool, but I don’t want to move a tree. Jesus, we are trying to build a welcoming church that proclaims your grace in a world that promotes isolation and division. What we want are safe schools, a healthy climate, a world where folks don’t go hungry, and where all people have access to mental and physical health care. The disciples’ pleas might have been a little different but I wonder if they too felt frustrated with Jesus hyperbolic mustard seed reply. He continues his teaching, telling another parable. The use of master and slave language is awkward if not painful to our modern ears. Yet, to still receive the message, we might think of it in terms of grabbing coffee from Tim Hortons. You don’t walk in and tell the staff let me serve you. You say thanks and grab your double/double for they are doing their job or fulfilling their duty.

Building communities of connection where healing, transformation, and forgiveness happen is our duty as modern-day followers of Jesus. This is no easy task but Jesus says we have what we need for this calling and if we doubt him… If we question God… Then we are in really good company.

# Poet Maya Angelou, bestselling author, recipient of the Presidential Medal of freedom, three-time grammy award winner, civil rights activist, and so much more famously said ““Each time I write a book, every time I face that yellow pad, the challenge is so great. I have written eleven books, but each time I think, ‘Uh oh, they’re going to find out now. I’ve run a game on everybody and they’re going to find me out.” Maya Angelou is not the only person to question their ability to fulfill their calling for there is no shortage of additional examples in scripture.

Sarah laughs at the Lord when she learns about her calling to have a Son in the book of Genesis.

Moses in Exodus says, You want me to lead my people from slavery into freedom? I have a speech impediment!

The prophet Jeremiah, exclaims I am way too young lord.

When Jonah learns he has to preach forgiveness to Ninevah he literally runs away.

Finally, those first disciples don’t really ever stop questioning.

The scriptures are filled with stories of people of faith who felt inadequate and wondered if they had what they needed. To be human is seemingly to struggle with imposter syndrome. Yet, to be a disciple is to move forward in faith with doubt. In the words of another preacher to realize God does not call the equipped. God equips the called. God has equipped you with faith.

Do not confuse faith for doctrine, or adhering to set beliefs or creeds. Faith is not to be measured with a ruler. Faith is not a cup, that for some is overflowing and others is half full or others almost empty. Faith is a gift and you were given it in the waters of Baptism. This gift forever unites us with the life, death, and rising of Christ. A Gift for when we feel like imposters, when we are lost, for when they only thing we are certain of is our failure. We gather in worship to be reminded of our calling and to hear again and again we are not imposters but always, Beloved Children of God. For our Identity, our purpose, and our faith is from God. Amen.