

Lord, increase our faith.

What a great request; what a great prayer.

So often Jesus' first followers, the people we call the disciples and apostles, asked him for other things.

Their more familiar requests were less noble in nature.

They asked Jesus for thrones in his Kingdom, when it came.

They asked Jesus to sit at his right hand and at his left.

They asked for his favor, in a long-running competition between John and Peter.

They asked for fire to call down on those they counted as enemies;

They wanted the power to censure those who dared heal in Jesus' name without their approval.

And given that the Scriptures perhaps remember them kindly, perhaps forget some of their worst moments, who knows what else they asked for?

Lord, increase our wealth, the success of our children, the fish in our nets, the wine in our cellars, the beauty of our wives.

Increase our security and position and power, they must have asked, if they were human.

And they were; the Gospels leave no doubt about that.

I wonder what you would ask God to increase for you? What do you want more of?

Probably something, for few of us stay satisfied.

I bet we would all say faith; we would like a greater confidence in God in the midst of our lives, a greater sense of assurance within, that God's promises are true for us.

We would like a greater faith, a reduction of anxiety, a holier comfort.

But, across a long life, we would also ask for lots of other things.

Job offers, promotions, and health; we'd like more of these.

More good fortune for those we love; more acceptance, support, and understanding for ourselves.

We might ask for more love, deeper friendships, more peace.

To ask God for these things does not seem to be unfaithful; as Jesus says, your heavenly Father knows you need these things.

Keeping body and soul together and enjoying the abundant life we are meant, each and all to share; we do well to ask God for these things.

But also to ask for an increase of faith, for it is sure that we will not get an increase in all of the other things we ask for.

Promotions and job offers will not come;

Support and understanding will sometimes be in short supply;

Even love and friendship will sometimes seem to be more scarce rather than increasing.

We will need, sometimes, to ask for greater faith to see our way through this life.

For one definition of faith would be a certain hope that things will all work out in the end.

And by work out, I mean, that we will be given the strength to find meaning and purpose in most of the things that come to pass, in the blessings not received, in the roads that were closed to us.

We need an increase of faith to sustain us in the face of the many other things that will not increase.

Faith, the conviction that all will be well in God, meets our deepest needs.

If the apostles had been modern clergy, they might have said “Lord, increase their pledges.”

Increase is one of the things that clergy and other church leaders hope for; more people, more programs, more money to get it all done.

And so we talk about stepping up a bit year by year; a percentage of income until you reach the tithe or 10% of the previous year’s pledge.

But I imagine that increased pledges won’t come because of pulpit cajoling.

An increase in pledges will not be the result of making the case for the good work we do together as the church.

No, increased faith will lead to increased generosity.

If we sense that what we have is enough; that we’d be fine with even less, if we have faith that we live in a world of plenty and are promised a kingdom, our works of giving and charity will increase.

We hold on tight to what we have when we fear that it might not be enough, when we wonder if we will make it through paying for braces, college, retirement, or hospital bills.

A stash of money is a great comfort, and we may find that we have put out faith in it.

The things we do with our money can also become objects of faith to us; we feel better about our place in the universe when we have something new that delights us, until the shine wears off.

When God grows the gift of faith within us, we find ourselves able to release the pressure of our grip on life and its good things.

And when God gives us greater faith, we are less inclined to seek comfort from the world of consumer experiences.

As we know, more and more deeply, that all will be well in God.