

Proper 22C
Timothy 1:1-7, 13-14; Luke 17:5-10
October 5, 2025

Fear and Faith
The Rev. Dr. Brandon Perrine

The apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our faith!” The Lord replied, “If you had faith the size of a mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and it would obey you. Who among you would say to your slave who has just come in from plowing or tending sheep in the field, ‘Come here at once and take your place at the table’? Would you not rather say to him, ‘Prepare supper for me; put on your apron and serve me while I eat and drink; later you may eat and drink’? Do you thank the slave for doing what was commanded? So you also, when you have done all that you were ordered to do, say, ‘We have done only what we ought to have done!’”

~o~

I’ve mentioned it before, but I was an anxious child. I worried incessantly. I was afraid constantly. Many nights I lay awake in my bed, head under the covers, worrying about all manner of things spiritual and temporal and when fear and fretting drove me from my bed and into the arms of my mother, she would reassure me with these words from the second letter to Timothy: that we have not been given “the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.” These words helped. Somehow the idea that the fear I felt was not intrinsic to my nature, but an alien and self-imposed agent, foreign to the boldness imbued by my creator, made it easier to set aside, at least for the night, and fall, finally, asleep.

This text evokes myriad images of grandmothers and mothers and church school teachers nurturing faith in children; of fears overcome;

hope boldly preached; and the treasury of wisdom passed from generation to generation. Perhaps it reminds you of wholesome family gatherings around the dinner table and grace offered before the meal; or of visiting your grandmother's house and noticing the worn King James Bible on her night table; or of vacation Bible school, or Sunday School, or Confirmation. Or, perhaps, it reminds you of when you discovered "the good treasure" of your faith for yourself.

This text is meant to be folksy and relatable, but couched in the familiar images is a profoundly empowering message: we have not been given "the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind." For the author, this power, and love, and sound mind provoked him to teach publically about his faith and challenge the powers of his day in light of Jesus' dream of the realm of heaven. What does our fear keep us from doing and what might a courageous faith allow us to do in our world, I wonder?

At a fundamental level, our fears evolved to keep us safe from threats. We know this. But, in the world of today, fear doesn't just help us survive. It can keep us from fully living. We fear people like bosses, politicians, ICE agents, strangers, neighbors, even our spouses. We fear other living things—snakes, spiders, sharks, and germs. We fear social situations, heights, aging, financial insecurity, war, separation from loved ones. We fear so many things—many of them legitimate. We know that some fears are good—they protect us, they keep us alive—but other fears keep us *from* life itself in all its fullness.

Perhaps that's where Jesus' teaching on faith comes in. In our reading from Luke's gospel, he tells the disciples that faith the size of a tiny mustard seed has the power to move a tree and plant it in the sea. In other words, a little goes a long way. Maybe faith is the counterbalance to fear—the kind of faith that Lois planted in Eunice, and Eunice nurtured in Timothy. Maybe trusting, just a bit, in God, or another person, or even in ourselves is the antidote to the paralyzing fear that keeps us from life itself in all its fullness. Maybe a seed of faith is all it takes to challenge injustice, or take a stand, or be all we can truly be.

On this Worldwide Communion Sunday, I am reminded that many in our world live with the very real fears of armed conflict, of disease, of famine or drought, of acts of terror. In this nation, we have fears of our own: politically motivated violence, gun violence, a dramatically shifting cultural landscape, unchecked power. And as a church, we're always afraid of financial hardship, decline, change, irrelevance, or being noticed by the powers that be.

Sometimes, when fear overwhelms, we have to rely on others to keep faith for us when we are unable to hold it for ourselves. Sometimes, we need to believe that people—even folks around the world—are in our corner working on our behalf. Sometimes, we need to know that another member of our church can hold that difficult truth we've been longing to share. Sometimes, we need to hope that even though we can't say the words, someone else's prayer on our behalf will be answered. Sometimes, when fear overwhelms, we have to rely on others to keep faith for us when we are unable to hold it for ourselves.

And maybe that's part of what we celebrate at this table today. Communion is not just about our private faith, but about a shared feast that stretches across cultures, languages, and generations. It's not a meal for the fearless or the perfect—it's a meal for the fearful and the imperfect, for those who are clinging to mustard seeds of faith, for those who need someone else to believe for them, for those who are still waiting for courage to catch up with calling.

Here, at this table, our little seed of faith is joined with the faith of others. Here, when we eat the bread and drink the cup, we remember that we belong to a communion wider and deeper than our fears. Here, we find the courage to take the next step, to speak the next truth, to risk the next act of love.

We may never uproot mulberry trees or banish all our fears, but Jesus promised that even the smallest seed of faith can take root and grow, and when we bring our seeds together, they become a harvest of hope the world cannot ignore.

And so, dear friends, do not be afraid. For we have not been given a spirit of fear, but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind. Thanks be to God. Amen.