

"Branching Out"

Camp Sunday
Spring 2017
Sean Binder

I bring you greetings from the Dakotas Camping and Retreat Ministries. It is with great joy that I share with you today some updates in the Camping and Retreat Ministries as well as share with you today's scriptural message. Before we dive into today's scripture I want to take some time to share about the Dakotas Camping and Retreat Ministries.

+Three Sites

+Growth at all three

+Partnership with Minnesota United Methodist Camping and Retreat Ministries

+Keith Shew

+Site Directors

-WAC, Paul and Brenda Lint

-LPC, Christy Heflin

-SMC, Scott Jensen

+MN Sister Sites

-Koronis

-Northern Pines

-Kowakan Adventures

Now let us turn to today's scripture. As we explore the scripture today we will discover how camping and retreat ministries invites us all to grow in faith, but I also believe that we all can apply this scripture to our daily lives. So before we dive in let us pray:

O' God may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be pleasing in your sight. You are my rock and redeemer, Amen.

Our scripture today comes from Matthew. Matthew, the first Gospel, was penned by an anonymous author.

While the early church unanimously held that Matthew himself was the author. More modern analysis shows cause to abandon this Matthean authorship ideology. Regardless of the author, the Gospel of Matthew relates the life and teachings of Jesus.

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The original text of Matthew was written in Greek and seems to be aimed at a Jewish readership. In contrast to Mark and other gospels, Matthew lacks explanation of Jewish customs, and focus on showing the fulfillment of the Old Testament. Scholars debate when it was written placing it in a time frame of 50 a.d. to 70 a.d.

It is in this account of Jesus' life that we find today's scripture. We jump into the life and teaching of Jesus at Chapter 17. The Gospel at this point has already related

- I. The Birth of Christ,
- II. The Beginnings of Jesus' Ministry
- III. Jesus' Ministry in Galilee
- IV. Jesus' Withdrawal from Galilee

And we find Jesus in Chapter 17 in the midst of his last ministry in Galilee.

Jesus had just taken Peter, James, and John up to a high mountain. Here they witnessed something astonishing to say the least. Matthew 17:2, "There he was transfigured before them."

Following this amazement they walked down the mountain discussing Elijah and eventually came to a crowd. In this crowd was a man with a boy. Matthew 17:15, "Lord have mercy on my son." His son had been suffering from seizures. The man had brought his son before the disciples. But they were unable to heal him. Jesus rebuked the demon and the boy was healed.

The disciples turned to Jesus in private and asked, "Why couldn't we drive it out?"

Here, Jesus replies, "Because, you have so little faith. I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you."

Many of us have heard this story told. And many times we get distracted in the teaching. I know I always gravitate toward the analogy of the mustard seed. But the mustard seed is simply an illustration. There is no mustard seed standard out there. We don't go about

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saying, "Oh that Sean, he only has two mustard seeds of Faith. But Pastor Britt, he has six mustard seeds." There is no standard of faith. Romans 12:3 states that God has distributed faith to each of us.

Rather this verse is about faith itself, having faith, growing in faith, and understanding that with it nothing is impossible.

We live in a time and culture that seems impossible in so many ways. Our lives are filled with divisive rhetoric, daily turmoil, struggles big and small. We spend so much time rebuking the mountain, yelling at it for not moving. We can get so focused on the issues at hand that we forget to take a step back and to have faith.

This year our camps are using a curriculum and theme titled "Branching Out." This title encompasses what Jesus calls us to do. When we use our faith it grows, when we speak our faith it grows. We are called to branch out and grow in faith. So that, we may move the mountains in our lives and in OUR world.

Camping and Retreat Ministries calls us all out of our daily lives and into a new community. It calls us into a community of intentional living. As campers of all ages play, study, eat, and live together they find ways to apply the spiritual lessons to everyday life. At camp everything becomes a tool for growth in Faith. Sure the swimming hole and challenge course are fun. However, they are tools for learning and growth. As a camper over comes fears and lets go into faith, they discover a whole new foundation in themselves and in God.

In our daily lives we are called into the unknown, we are called into difficult and fearful situations. There are times we feel, like the disciples on that day, that we are unable to handle a situation. But Jesus shows us that at the foundation, we can and must have faith. Have faith and know that there are spiritual blessings on the other side of our difficulties. Hebrews 11:1 states, "Now faith is the confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see."

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To have even a thread of hope and assurance, that is a powerful thing.

Jesus could have said,

"If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this light beam, 'heal this blind eye,' and they eye would be healed. Nothing will be impossible for you."

"If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, point sound waves at the belly of a pregnant woman and you will see her unborn baby. Nothing will be impossible for you."

With faith we can do all these wonders and so much more.

This summer we are excited to be Branching Out in Faith. To know that with faith nothing is impossible.