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 #3—Sermon Series
 It's Ok If You're Not Ok

Taking Inventory of Your Life
Matthew 17:14-21, 2 Timothy 1:3-7

¹⁴ When they came to the crowd, a man came to Jesus, knelt before him, ¹⁵ and said, "Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is an epileptic and he suffers terribly; he often falls into the fire and often into the water. ¹⁶ And I brought him to your disciples, but they could not cure him." ¹⁷ Jesus answered, "You faithless and perverse generation, how much longer must I be with you? How much longer must I put up with you? Bring him here to me." ¹⁸ And Jesus rebuked the demon,^[d] and it^[e] came out of him, and the boy was cured instantly. ¹⁹ Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, "Why could we not cast it out?" ²⁰ He said to them, "Because of your little faith. For truly I tell you, if you have faith the size of a^[f] mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you."^[g]

It's the **third week in our Sermon Series: *It's Ok If You're Not Ok*.**

The first week we talked about ***admitting your struggles*** in life.

Last week we talked about ***letting go of what you can't control***

(which is pretty much everything in life!)

And, if you ***miss*** any of the sermons, you can always find them in print or audio on our church's website.

This third week is about ***taking an inventory of your life***, especially your faith.

And like the prior weeks in this series,

it draws some of its ***inspiration from the 12 steps***.

I know that ***not everyone struggles with addiction***,

but I believe that we all struggle with something—

and that the wisdom of the 12 steps are deeply connected to the wisdom of the Bible,

because so much of it is about ***honesty, and surrendering*** to God.

Who doesn't need more of that?

In the 12 steps of AA, or any other 12 step group—

The ***first step*** is ***admitting*** that you are powerless over your addiction or your struggle, and that your life is out of control.

Step 2 is ***believing God can restore*** your sanity.

Step 3 is ***turning your will and your life over*** to God.

And Step 4 is ***making a searching and fearless moral inventory*** of ourselves.

Why?

That's steps 3-5:

It's so you can ***admit to God, yourself, and one other person***,
all of your mistakes,

Then be ***prepared to have God remove*** your defects of character,

Then ***humbly ask God*** to do so.

Maybe this process ***sounds strange*** to you,

but I'm going to suggest that it shouldn't.

The Bible might call this process confession and ***repentance***.

In the ***Old Testament*** to repent means ***to be sorry or regret (nacham)***

but more often it means to ***turn, or return (shuw), to God***.

In the ***New Testament*** to repent means ***to change one's mind, and go in a new direction***.

I once heard that the Greek word ***metanoeo***

had also been used ***militarily***, to describe a soldier marching one direction,
and then making an about face to walk in the opposite direction.

So ***to repent*** in the New Testament is like deciding to take a certain road,

but it's the ***wrong way on the one way*** street—

so you get off and turn around, to go the right way.

This is ***different than the world's idea of repentance or being sorry***.

Paul explains this in ***2 Corinthians 7:10***:

For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation and brings no regret, but worldly grief produces death.

In other words, the ***worldly idea of repentance or being sorry***
is tied to guilt and shame.

But for the ***Christian repentance is NOT about guilt or shame***,
 (which sounds like great news to me!)
 and it is ***beyond an apology or confession---***
 it is about ***changing*** your heart and life!
 It is about ***new life***, or salvation!

It's kind of like when you say to someone who has messed up,
 this is good, very good that you are confessing, and you are sorry.
 Now, what are you ***going to do differently?***
 How will you have a change of heart and life?

God doesn't want guilt or shame.

In fact, I'd argue that God doesn't want us to be motivated by guilt and shame.
God wants a changed life.

But it all begins with ***knowing who we are and what we've done.***
 That searching and fearless ***moral inventory.***

So, who are we?

What are our lives like, right now, today?

Where are we ***struggling?***

Where are we trying to ***exert control*** over everything or everyone?

And how are we letting go?

And what about our faith?

What is the state of our faith?

If you are human, and honest,
 you'll probably join me in saying that sometimes our faith
 is the ***size of the mustard seed*** I showed the kids today.

Ever felt that way?

That your faith is small? Wavering? Lacking?

I sure have!

And as Americans, ***our tendency is to just try harder to get more faith.***

Like—just try and believe in God a little more.

Read more books, go to church more, recite certain Bible verses.

And that's a **problem**—very common in American Christianity—it's a **works-based faith**.

It says that we are in **charge** of our faith,
and we can **work hard** to get more,
and when we do, **life will be better!**

What's wrong with that?

Possibly everything.

Remember the part about letting go of what we can't control?

This way of earning more faith overlooks the fact
that ***even faith is a gift from God.***

We like to think we came up with it,
and we **DO give** our lives to God,
but it's not just a one-way street.

Faith is us believing in God, but it's also God believing in us.

What if this is why in Mark 9:23-25, the father brought his sick child to Jesus,
and Jesus said: "*If^a you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes.*"

²⁴ *Immediately the father of the child cried out and said with tears,
"Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!"*

Are there any truer words?

Who among us wants to have faith?

And knows we need some more?

So when Jesus is talking about ***faith of a mustard seed***

being able to move mountains, I'm in!

Because some days that's what ***faith feels like—that small.***

So why does Jesus in one breath seem to ***scold the disciples***

for their small faith,

and later ***encourage*** it?

Jesus ***admits they were not able to cure*** the boy with epilepsy,
because of their small faith.

The father said: I brought him to your disciples, but they could not cure him."

¹⁷ *Jesus answered, "You faithless and perverse generation, how much longer must*

I be with you? How much longer must I put up with you? Bring him here to me.
And Jesus healed him instantly.

¹⁹ *Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said,
“Why could we not cast it out?”*

²⁰ *He said to them, “**Because of your little faith.**”*

But then right after that he says:

*For truly I tell you, **if you have faith the size of a mustard seed,**
you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move;
and **nothing will be impossible** for you.”^[a]*

***So which is it—is a small faith enough?
Or is it hindering*** our lives and ministries?

Well.....What if we’re ***asking the wrong questions?***
What if it’s not actually about ***how much*** faith we have—
but ***what we do with the faith that we do have?***

It’s ***not good to think*** that our small faith
can be increased by our own works.

We are saved by God’s grace, not our hard work.

But—we live out that grace by ***using our good works,***
and ***exercising our faith!***

One of the most famous verses of the Reformation is ***Ephesians 2:8-10:***

***For by grace you have been saved through faith,
and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—***

⁹ ***not the result of works, so that no one may boast.***

But here’s how it continues:

¹⁰ ***For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works,
which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.***

So we can’t earn our salvation,

We don’t create our faith, ***it’s a gift.***

But we do ***live it out, and good works are what we were created to do!***

We DO choose God, but God FIRST chose us!

So, what does Jesus want from us and our mustard seed faith?

If we can't earn or make more, what's the deal?

All throughout his life on earth, Jesus, although he was God, did not rely upon Himself for everything.

He turned to his Father God in heaven.

In the Gospels he makes this clear over and over and over again.

This is why he spends so much time in ***prayer***, and ***solitary time*** with God.

***And if Jesus—who is God—needed time with God—and relied on God--
How much more do we?***

What if mustard seed faith is just fine,

As long as we ***surrender*** that faith to God,

and ***ask for God's help to live*** that faith?

Jesus talks about ***mustard seeds*** several times.

Mustard seeds are ***very, very small seeds***, like I showed the kids, just 1 to 2 millimeters in diameter.

These seeds germinate within ten days if placed in the right conditions.

Many Bible commentaries say that ***mature mustard plants*** can grow into shrubs or trees as tall as a horse and its rider.

Some stories say that they can grow tall enough to ride a horse underneath!

Jesus compared the ***kingdom of God to a mustard seed***.

In Luke 13:18-19: *Jesus said, "What is the kingdom of God like? And to what shall I compare it? It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and put in his garden; and it grew and became a large tree, and the birds of the air nested in its branches."*

Mustard seeds are important because they have ***great potential, potential that isn't seen in the size of the seed***.

In Luke 17:5-6 Jesus uses a ***mustard seed to teach about faith***:

"And the apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith." So the Lord said, "If you have faith as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be pulled up by the roots and be planted in the sea,' and it would obey you."

In his commentary on that verse, preacher Fred Craddock says so eloquently,
*"Even the small faith they already have
 cancels out words such as 'impossible' (a tree being uprooted)
 and 'absurd' (planting a tree in the sea)
 and puts them in touch with the power of God."* Fred Craddock, *Luke: Interpretation Series*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1990) , p. 200.

So what if Jesus is ***not simply scolding*** the disciples for their small faith?
 What if he is ***shaking his head at them***,
 because they have forgotten to live out their faith by relying on God?

What if ***Jesus doesn't want us to work harder*** for more faith?
 What if he wants us to realize even our mustard seed faith is ***enough---***
if we rely on Him to work in us?

Rick Warren begins his book *The Purpose Driven Life*, by saying these words
 about finding our purpose in life:

It's not about you.

What if it's really not about us?

But about Christ at work in us?

Jesus often says to his disciples, *oh you of little faith*, like in Matthew 8:26
 when a storm comes upon their boat and the disciples are afraid!

So, what if Jesus is saying---look, I AM HERE.

You need faith—in ME.

You need to rely---ON ME.

What if the ***point of an inventory*** of our life and faith
 is not about the size of our faith—
 but about ***what God can do even with a little bit of faith?***

I think this is what Paul is saying to his protégé Timothy in
 2 Timothy 1:3-7 today, when he says: *I am grateful to God...when I remember
 youI am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that lived first in your
 grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, lives in you.*
⁶*For this reason I remind you to **rekindle the gift of God** that is within you
 through the laying on of my hands; ⁷for God did not give us a spirit of fear, but
 rather a spirit of power and of love and of sound mind.*

Taking an inventory of our lives is important—

to remember the people who have poured their faith into our lives!

Who is that in your life?

Who shared their faith with you?

From whom did you learn about faith?

For Timothy it was his mother and grandmother.

Who has it been for you?

That's an ***important question***,

especially when we feel like we have no faith left, you know?

Because most of us are here in this place

because someone shared their faith with us,

someone showed us God's love and grace,

someone invited us to know more about Jesus, right?

And it's great to think about those people

who filled the bucket of God's love in our hearts with their own faith!

All too often ***we forget these gifts***,

sometimes we don't ever thank the people in our lives

who have shared their faith with us!

But we should—because they have been God's instruments in our lives.

As Mother Teresa would say, they have been the ***pencils in the hand of God***.

Sometimes when our faith feels low and lacking,

We need only to ***stop and remember*** who has poured it into us—

and who ***continues to do so today!***

In Exodus 17:12-14, the Israelites were encountering their first opposition while wandering in the desert.

The Amalekites attacked them.

While Joshua led the troops into battle, Moses, along with Aaron and Hur, watched the battle from a nearby hill.

And when Moses held his hand up, Israel prevailed, but

when he let his arms down, the Amalekites prevailed.

Eventually, Moses became so weary,

that Aaron and Hur started holding up his arms

until the Israelites were able to finally defeat the Amalekites!

There are people in ***our past, and people today***
who hold up our arms.

Who are those people in your life?

Ideally, in the body of Christ,
we do that for one another all the time.

***If you can't pray because you are so weak and weary, don't worry—
we will pray for you!***

If you can't believe that God will get you through this tough season of life—
don't worry—***we will believe for you!***

An ***honest inventory*** of our lives and our faith realizes ***two things:***

One, it's not all about us.

We have help in our faith.

A lot of help—in the past, and still today.

We have help, from God, and from one another.

And two, ***it doesn't matter the size*** of our faith—
because even faith like the smallest mustard seed
has the potential to grow into the tallest tree,
if we will rely on God!

In fact, Jesus says to us still today:

*For truly I tell you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed,
you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move;
and nothing will be impossible for you."*

That, my friends, is the ***amazing!***

When our faith is in Jesus,

When our faith rests on the power of Jesus,

We can say to those mountains—move!

And nothing will be impossible for us.

It doesn't matter if that faith in our hearts is small.

Because our God is not small!

It also doesn't matter if we have our lives all together!

None of us have our lives together!

Life is not about us---
it's about ***what God can and will do through us!***

In other words, ***It's Ok If You're Not Ok!***
None of us are,
and all of us have the ***power of Jesus a prayer, a word, a breath away!***
And Paul reminds us in Romans 8
that ***NOTHING can separate us*** from the love of Jesus!

So Friends, hear the ***Good News of the Gospel:***
We are called to ***look at our lives and our faith,***
But not to find we are lacking.
It's to ***see what we've been given, and what is still to come.***

Even faith as small as a mustard seed can do the impossible,
if it relies upon the power of our Savior Jesus Christ.
And to that, all God's people said, Amen.