St. Brendan's
Luke 12:32-40
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I admit I struggled with this passage. What a hodgepodge of a gospel about faith. While it echoes what Jesus said in last week's passage, it seems to go off in all kinds of directions as if Jesus might be getting to the end of his patience…sell all your possessions, get dressed and have you lamps lit, open the door, be ready, but watch out that your house isn't broken into all in the name of faith. He tenderly calls his disciples his "*Litle Flock"*. He doesn't command them he invites them to trust that God wants to give them the free and gracious gift of the kingdom if only their faith opens their hearts to receive the gift.

Faith…I always think of Mother Theresa who in her early life had several experiences of Jesus, but, then spent the rest of her life serving the poor and never had another single spiritual experience. But as Hebrews tells us this morning, *"Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."* She wrote that she prayed Jesus would come to her again, but that never happened and yet, she kept on and kept on caring for the poor.

I don't for a second believe Jesus was saying to go out and sell everything we own…if we did that how could we help others in need. Jesus knows you can't force people to have faith, nor can you teach people to have faith, which is why Jesus uses metaphor and imagery… even poetry to invite each of us to find faith in our own unique way

As a child I loved going to church…I'm sure you've heard me say that before…there was something so sacred and deep in that candle lit space. I loved the hymns. I loved hearing the psalms and the stories. I can't say I thought much about faith. I just felt like Jesus loved me.

And then I was hit by a pickup truck as I tried to push my little brother out of the way. I was a mess. Afterwards I had to learn to walk and talk again. But that first night in the hospital I met Jesus standing by my hospital bed. I heard him so clearly say that I was going to be okay. And I trusted Jesus. But I still didn't think much about faith.

Ten years later that same little brother was killed in a fall from a ladder when he was 17 yrs old. At the time, I thought about all those years I had wasted thinking that Jesus loved me. If Jesus had really loved me, he wouldn't have let my brother die. I promised never to darken the door of a church again in my life. And I left church for 10 yrs. But curiously what I didn't notice at the time was how often I continued to pray to Jesus. One could say go figure, but I'm as sure as Pastor Elaine was when she spoke about Jesus holding her in her sermon last week that Jesus held me close all those years. Even if I wasn't aware of it then. I am now.

Only after my son who was named after my brother was born did I return to church. A friend stopped by and asked if I wanted to go to church with her the coming Sunday. She had a young son about my son's age. I figured if nothing else, I could escape when the two boys got too noisy. The only reason I agreed to go with her was because I was living alone on a mountain top in rural Connecticut and I was lonely.

I can only think there was a trickle of faith somewhere in me and walking into that church released it after all those years. I saw the candles and smelled some lingering incense. I felt as if I'd come home to a place where I could be reminded of our identity as God's beloved children and as Pastor David Lose put it a place where we "can be *affirmed in our inherent self-worth and dignity that we can, indeed see all those around us as similarly beloved and deserving of self-worth, dignity and God's good pleasure.*

I tell you this story to assure you that faith does not adhere to a straight path…the storms of life sometimes seem to bury it, sometimes the currents of life seem to carry it away. And maybe that's why Jesus used so many metaphors and images to describe what had to happen for faith to deepen and flourish. If I'd had a more mature faith, would I have trusted that Jesus would carry me through some of those rough years. Maybe…but the point is, even though I faltered Jesus didn't.

"For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also," Jesus tells us. There is not a person sitting in this church who doesn't know this. And when we come together as a church community, we affirm and reaffirm each other when we sometimes falter or feel as if we have lost our faith. What we know is that we have each other's back, no matter what. May we learn to trust that even faith the size of a mustard seed is acceptable to God.

Recently, Richard Rohr wrote in one of his meditations, *"Religion is not a moral matter; it is mystical."* Yes, faith is mystical. As Tagore wrote all those years ago, *"Faith is the bird that feels the light and sings when the dawn is still dark."*
Amen