

**Sermon Notes:** October 2, 2022

**Focus:** St. Francis, faithfulness, and money [Lectionary Readings](#)

I hope to complete a sermon triangle of St. Francis, faithfulness, and money. St. Francis is a “heroic” and highly admirable saint. He is so admirable that it might be easy to discount his example as impractical for us today. How many of us would renounce our family wealth to live the life of a holy beggar and religious devotee? I am guessing near zero. However, his impulse to live more simply is something we can all relate to.

Most of us want to be less busy. We long to shake off at least some of our endless duties and obligations. We want to trust God to meet our daily needs - without all the hustle. Some of us in the middle season of life would like to figure out how to live on less and dream of downsizing. A few of us are craving ways to start completely over, hard computer reset style. The only way any of these impulses can be expressed in a life-giving way is when our tiny sprouts of longing are surrounded by God’s forest of faithfulness.

Faithfulness in life and money is very easy and very hard. Jesus reminds us that it is easy because we have heaven and earth supporting us. It is hard because we think we must grind our way through life. Faith gets relegated to the cherry on top. Because most of us have been grinding for so long, generosity with money can feel special and extraordinary. The holy truth is that we were born to be generous with our time, gifts, and money. It’s normal, not extra, to be generous. A generous faithfulness is a gift meant to be received and shared.

**Side bar:** Thinking everything is up to you, your sweat, your hustle, your grind is a trauma response. You were born ready to collaborate and share, but the school-of-hard-knocks beat it out of you. In my own life, when I think everyone has let me down, it is not true. People *will* let you down, but they will also rally to your side. If you are open to it, there are always more “rally people” than disappointing people. I spent my childhood believing that no one can help me. It has taken 40 years and a forest of evidence to realize that God’s faithfulness is the antidote to my wincing self-reliance.

### **Faithfulness: Marcus Borg**

In *The Heart of Christianity: Rediscovering a Life of Faith*, Borg has a beautiful meditation on faithfulness broken down into categories.

**Visio** is the faith of seeing. For Borg, there are three ways to see our world: hostile, indifferent, and gracious. A hostile visio builds on self-defense because something/someone is out to get us. An indifferent visio leads to a hideout mentality because no one is looking out for you. Borg’s best option for this category (visio faith) is gracious. This makes sense to me: look for faith in beauty and kindness. Look and you will find a gracious vision.

**Fidelitas** is the faith of attentiveness and loyalty to God. I think fidelitas gets a bad rap as an old-time religion. Fidelitas is where the rubber meets the road. Fidelitas is individual and collective. Your loyalty to God is found in prayer and meditation, *and* could you ask for the

grace to be loyal to the church? The church is not just a collection of individuals doing their own thing, but a collective where we all come to find spiritual refuge.

**Fiducia** is the faith of trust—a "radical trust in God." Even when surrounded by lions, fiducia gets you through it. J.K Rowling says, "Rock bottom became the solid foundation on which I rebuilt my life." Faith is knowing that God has your back.

**Assensus** is the faith of assenting to something. It gets a bad rap too as blind obedience to a creed or for being overly intellectual. For Borg, assensus (at its best) means seeing Jesus as the decisive disclosure of God and of what a life full of God looks like. It means affirming Jesus as the Word of God, the Wisdom of God. Borg's words to further describe assensus are "deeply and loosely."

Borg writes about deeply and loosely, "faith involves our loyalty and trust and seeing at the deepest level of the self and loosely: we need to avoid the human tendency toward excessive precision and certitude." At our highest - we are not know-it-alls but are deeply into what we do know and loose enough not to insist on our own way. We give our hearts to God, who gives us something to 'assent to' outside of ourselves, family, or world.

**Faithfulness: Jesus** He uses the image of a mustard seed to show that faith is not a quantity. It is:

- a direction to look (visio),
- a practice of commitment (fidelitas),
- a trust that the bottom is solid (fiducia)
- a destination of our heart (assensus)

If you start with these practices - even as small as a mustard seed - it is more than enough.

**Faithfulness: Mustard Seed** Mustard has many places in the bible and agriculture of the day.

- Most species of mustard average 120 days from seed to flower.
- Depending on species, it grows up to 12 ft high and impossible to get rid of once established.
- Levitical Law was keen on not mixing species and foods for practical reasons: mustard could be invasive and mess up certain crops.

Not a very tidy religious image, is it?

Let's wrap up today. St. Francis lived wild and simple. He gave us *one* way to imagine faithfulness. Our own mustard seed of faithfulness is enough too - with God's help. Start practicing generosity and you will find God right alongside you. Faithful, generous, and caring are descriptions of who you naturally are. You are enough. May your heart, mind and pocketbook all align to faithfulness and may your visio, fidelitas, fiducia, assensus be supported by a forest of grace.

**Todd**