

Center UMC/November 13, 2011/Psalm 43/I Kings 18:19-39/Exodus 24:1-13
The Measure of our Faith: Mountain Climbing Faith
Rev. Daniel D. Rasmussen

A farmer has described the terrifying moments after he severed his leg in a machinery accident and then drove for help. Larry Knust, 59, from Clay County, Indiana, was sweeping corn into an auger when he slipped. His right foot became trapped between the rotating blades pushing the grain into a bin. As the machine took hold, the farmer realized he would have to break off his foot to save his life. He timed the rotations so that he could pull out what remained of his leg. Once freed, he hopped nearly 120ft to his truck and drove the two and a half miles to his father's house for help.

So, as Larry faced his mountain he did not have time to pray about it – if he is a praying man. He had only seconds to think, and those seconds were filled with pain and shock, and yet he kept his presence of mind. He acted in a second, he thought instantly and acted and because of that he is alive today. How often do we throw up our hands, and in a sense, play dead when faced with overwhelming odds? Most of us would have been found dead in the auger.

So what mountain are you facing? For some of you it is ill health. Or the ill health of a loved one. Those are serious mountains. Those are mountains that at times don't get climbed. It is possible that we start up never to make it over them. Sometimes though, they are ours to climb, and we choose to not risk it, not try it, we stay where we are, where we are comfortable, or we stay with what we know, and never risk moving beyond it. We stay on the ground and never take the only step that matters, which is the first one. . . However long that first step is, or however short it is, that first one is the only one we can take. You cannot start with the second step.

My steps have held to Your paths; my feet have not slipped. I call on You, O God, for You will answer me; give ear to me and hear my prayer. Show the wonder of Your great love, You who save by Your right hand those who take refuge in You from their foes. (from their mountains) Psalm 17:5-7

Some of us, when faced with a challenge, sit down to calculate what it is going to take to overcome the obstacle, whatever it is. Now that is not a bad plan, unless of course, that is the only part of the plan we ever engage.

"Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, saying, 'This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.'

"Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace? "In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be My disciple." Luke 14:28ff. Does this sound like a mountain that we are expected to not climb? We are called to give it up.

Elijah faced a very serious mountain when he took on those prophets of baal. He literally not only had to climb a mountain, but he took on their gods with a show of spiritual faith and force that to this day stands as one of the greatest faith contests of all time.

When Moses heard God say, come up the mountain. What kind of mountain climbing faith did that require of him? The Bible says he “met” with God. In fact, the elders saw something like sapphire pavement under His feet.

So again: what mountain are you facing? What is the first step you have to take?

What is interesting is that the Bible does not seem to waiver on what it says about giving. In nearly everything that has to do with money in our culture, when you read closely there is an asterisk and then further down there is fine print. A local commercial this week advertised a Kia Soul for only \$59 a month. Wow! Who can't afford that? But if you lunge at the screen for the half second that the fine print appears, it lets you know that you have to have \$3,000.00 down, and that for every mile over 12,000 and in some cases, 10,000 a year you will have to sell the farm to pay the crazy mileage fee for per mile overage. There is an asterisk.

Not in the Bible. The word of God calls for a tithe. There is not one asterisk on which anyone will find his or her name or circumstance that allows for a negotiation for less than a tithe. Ten percent is God's expectation.

What will you commit to God? What are you willing to give Him? Jesus gave His all for you? He gave even life for you. What will you give Him? Will you allow yourself this act of faith, so that you can live free of the tyranny of money? I hope that for the only cause that matters, you will join me in the weeks ahead in pledging and delivering your faith in God on a tithe. It takes mountain climbing faith to do so, and yet the Bible shows that climbing that mountain always takes us closer to His presence.