Two Words That Change Everything

On Sunday, we talked about two magical words that have the power to change everything.

1. Warm up question: Suppose you were entrusted with a secret magical formula which, when uttered, would empower you to go anywhere and do anything in the world once. Where would you go and what would you do?

2. Life is full of situations, large and small, that threaten to overwhelm us. On Sunday, Jeff told us about three fellow congregants facing major health crises: Rich Dennis, as he struggles to recover from being hit by a bus; Louann Lowring, as she battles heart disease; and Charlotte Egler, as she battles Stage IV breast cancer. Pick one of those three situations and try to imagine yourself in it. In your worst moments, how do you think it would affect you? What would you be thinking and feeling?

3. We all face a mixture of challenges, large and small, that threaten to beat down our spirit.

   a. As you think back over your past week, tell us about a simple situation you faced that threatened to take your spirit to a negative place and ruin your day (or at least a portion of your day).

   b. Tell us about a really big challenge you face in your life right now that threatens to take your spirit to a negative place.

4. Read Matthew 17:9, 14-21. This story happened right after Jesus, Peter, James, and John came down from the Mount of Transfiguration. Immediately, Jesus was faced with a desperate, some might say hopeless, situation.

   a. The nine disciples who hadn't gone up the mountain with Jesus tried to cure the epileptic boy and failed. How do you think they felt when their attempts failed?

   b. How do you think the father felt in this situation? (When in your life have you felt like that?)

   c. How do you think the epileptic boy felt after the failed attempt to cure him?

   d. How do you think Jesus felt when he was confronted with the situation?

   e. Which character in this this story do you most naturally identify with – and why?

5. In verse 20, Jesus says, "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.'" Do you think Jesus literally meant we can move a mountain if we had enough faith? If not, then what's his point?

6. Read II Corinthians 12:1-10. Some Christian traditions teach that, if you have enough faith, you can get whatever you ask in prayer. Other traditions say that even the greatest faith can't cause something to happen that isn't part of God's design.

   a. Do you think Paul's prayer to be healed was not answered due to a lack of faith? If not, why then was Paul's prayer not answered?

   b. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus also experienced an unanswered prayer. He prayed, "If it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want, but what You want." (Matthew 26:39.) What do you think we should we learn from this unanswered prayer?

   c. How might we reconcile the unanswered prayers of Jesus and Paul with what Jesus said in Matthew 17:20?

7. Jeff suggested that the key to reconciling all this might be found in Mark's version of the story of the epileptic boy. There Jesus says to the boy's father, "All things are possible to the one who believes." (Mark 9:23.) Jeff interpreted these words to mean: Whenever I speak the words "I believe" in any awful situation, the power of those words transform that situation from one that's hopeless to one that bristles with divine possibilities. In other words, believing doesn't necessarily get me exactly what I want, but it does open up all kinds of powerful possibilities.

   a. Jeff offered a few examples of that phenomenon at work – the safe return of Apollo 13, the woman who wanted to be buried with her fork, and Jeff's own experience this past week with the complexity of leading such a diverse church as ours. Jeff told how he was feeling a sense of despair that was instantly transformed when the words "I believe" hit him. He compared it to a Red's Apple Ale moment. Have you ever experienced a time when reframing a situation through the eyes of faith completely changed how you felt about it?

   b. When we speak the words "I believe" into any situation, what does that mean? Believe what?

   c. Go back to the simple challenging situation from this past week that you mentioned in response to Question 3a above. If you had spoken the words "I believe" into that situation, how might that have changed things?

   d. Go back to the huge challenge you mentioned in response to Question 3b. If you speak the words "I believe" into that situation, how might it change things?

   e. Someday all of us will face death. What's the practical difference between facing death with an "I believe" perspective versus a despair perspective?

In your prayer time tonight, please remember Rich, Louann, and Charlotte!