

College students aren't the only ones these days who enjoy guzzling down a Red Bull, Monster, Rockstar, or a variety of other energy drinks that are available at our grocery stores and gas station mini marts! It would seem that almost everyone from your typical teenager, to your eccentric Pastor in the pulpit, to your semi-retired teacher grading papers, might need that extra burst of energy from time to time.

You've got an 8:00am class, a four—hour sales meeting, a long day of farming ahead of you, a twelve hour shift at the factory after getting only 6 hours of sleep, and you are bound to need something to give you a little pick me up. Whether we want to admit to it or not, I believe that a number of us, even if we are no longer in high school, and it has been decades since we have attended a frat party, can relate to the twenty first century generation of young adults looking for a quick way to spike their energy levels.

Traditionally, that role has usually been served and filled by a strong cup of coffee, but these days the latte is passé — the real adrenaline buzz now comes from a can. Either a small 8 oz can featuring a bull with wings, or that 24 oz tall boy featuring glowing claw marks, or other fun and exciting names and logos. Enter the energy drink.

Need to fly through that midterm? Crack open a Red Bull (it “gives you wings”). Drained after a night of clubbing? Get back on track and recuperate miraculously with a can of Rock Star Recovery.” Got a gigantic project to tackle? A big task like that might call for a big can of “No Fear.” Full Throttle and Bang are other options. With colorful names and word of mouth buzz, energy drinks have become the fastest growing segment of the soft drink market. Now there are over 190 brands of energy drinks following in the wake of Red Bull, the overhyped daddy of them all.

So what's the attraction? It's probably not the taste. Red Bull, for example, tastes something like "liquid SweetTarts gone bad!" The caffeine, rather than the flavor, might be the bigger draw, but the reality is that an average energy drink has about the same caffeine content as a weak cup of coffee. Perhaps people consume them because of what the beverage makers claim their drinks can do for us. Here are just a few of the rather vaguely stated "benefits" of chugging them down:• Improved performance• Improved concentration and reaction speed• Improved vigilance• Improved emotional status• A stimulated metabolism.

While a *Men's Fitness* magazine study showed that there may be some short—term benefit in a Red Bull buzz, the effects may be more psychological than physical. Fact is, there's sort of an of attraction, or it can be kind of appealing to think that slamming down a can of Red Bull can turn you from a tired wimp to a stampeding stud or studette. To put it in perspective for the boomers among us, it's the pop culture equivalent of Popeye scarfing down a can of spinach which, when you think about it, may have been the original can of Full Throttle.

Whatever the situation, whether we are facing a final, or battling a Brutus, the cry goes out from the tired and fragile among us: "Just gimme the juice!" In fact, when the disciples cry out to Jesus in our Gospel story for today from Luke to, "Increase our faith!" you might say that it sounds very much like a similar request for an instant energy boost. "Just gives us the power, just give us the absolute certainty, the full on confidence, give us the juice!" We might also ask that of Jesus from time to time ourselves!!!!

In 4 verses prior to our narrative, Jesus tells his disciples that they have a deep responsibility to not "cause little ones to stumble" in sin. Not only that, when someone wrongs them they are to forgive the person who sins against them even "seven times a day." The persistence, and energy it takes, to guard oneself and others from wrong, and to forgive even the repeat offender is daunting. It's no

wonder, then, that the disciples, hearing Jesus' commands, *were suffering from a severe case of spiritual fatigue!*

Spiritually speaking, the demands of discipleship can leave even the strongest among us feeling tired and defeated. What used to be called “burnout” among clergy and other dedicated church folk now has a new name: “compassion fatigue.” It’s that exhaustion that comes from always being in output mode, caring for and nurturing others without recharging our spiritual batteries. It’s a deep tiredness that can leave even the most devoted disciples dreading the next phone call, visit, Bible study, volunteer opportunity, Sunday school preparation, or even sermon writing! There’s always something to be done and someone to do it for.

We can become like the lay leader who once remarked to a clergy colleague, “Ministry would be a great job — if it weren’t for all these people!” It’s during these times of spiritual fatigue that we join the disciples in wanting an energy—a cranked shot of faith, and we’ll try to get it in many different ways.

For some, the quick fix can be found in: the latest seminar, book, retreat, or Faith based Evangelistic program that brings with it the rush of a dynamic spiritual “high.” We figure that all we need is a lot more faith, a lot more time, and a lot more energy. We vow to do better and, freshly fueled with new ideas, we plunge back into the grind determined that we’ll be okay and that, finally, everybody’s needs will get met.

Problem is that when the effect of the proverbial potion wears off, we’re more burnt out than we were before — our time toasted, our energy exhausted, and our people peeved. Jesus’ response to “gimme the juice” is to instead give them some advice. The answer isn’t more faith or a cranked—up, caffeine—fueled ministry — it’s simply embracing the faith you have — even if it isn’t much, even if it is only a little bit.

Jesus uses the metaphor of a mustard seed — the tiniest of seeds — to symbolize the kind of faith his followers should embrace. This is because *over time*, a mustard seed grows, matures, and blossoms. But that takes steady nurture, constant care, the right conditions, and a patient vision for the long term. In the same way, true faith is the result of the long-haul discipline of discipleship. It starts small and grows gradually, steadily, intentionally.

So... in truth, there is no faith shaped Red Bull buzz. No Monster faith, or Rock Star faith, or Full Throttle faith. There is, as Jesus mentions in our story, a Mustard Seed Faith. That's it. But that's enough — more than enough. If you want to do well on exams, climb the corporate ladder, mountain bike in the Himalayas, if you want to pastor a church, lead a Bible study, or serve a neighbor, the real energy for execution isn't found in the bottom of a loudly labeled can. What we really need is proper rest, good nutrition, plenty of good old water and, if we are a follower of Christ, *a simple faith in God's ability to use us to do the impossible*.

Jesus said that even a little faith could cause a mulberry tree, a shrub known for its deep and entangled roots, to be uprooted and “planted in the sea.” Impossible? Absurd? That's the point. But notice that Jesus doesn't say how long pulling up those deep roots will take. It may take a frenzied minute or a lifetime, but with faith even the most stubborn, entangled lives can be moved!

Which begs the question, what are the impossible tasks in our lives? • Forgiving others — repeatedly? • Watching out for others? • Getting to the root of relationship problems? • Serving the needs of others? Here's the good news: The more daunting the task, the weaker we may feel, the more God can work in us, and through us, if we'll only have faith. Faith is not about our ability to do the job, rather it is about God's ability to do the job through us, and we know that with God “all things are possible.”

Though I often wonder, how many people, like the disciples in our text, actually really want to have more faith? I mean, what might happen to us if and when God were to honor our request? What might happen if we were to receive a jolt in our beliefs from being nourished by the sacraments, from consuming the Word of God, from drinking in his Spirit through prayer and fellowship with other disciples? More faith could lead us to stop doing some of the sinful things we like to do. More faith could lead us to be more forgiving towards those who have sinned against us –and we really don't want to forgive some of those mean, rotten people in our lives, or do we? In some cases, we would like to see them suffer, or worse...

More faith could lead us to be more like the slave in the story at the end of our text. That is, we become more dutiful slaves of God. Doing our duties willingly: Being more dutiful in attending worship services every week, being more dutiful in contributing generously of our time and money to the church, and to the needy, and being more dutiful and doing such duties without grumbling or complaining. Could more faith mean sacrificing one's own pleasures for the sake of the needy? Could more faith mean following more closely in the footsteps of Jesus –which led him to ridicule, and suffering, and death on the cross?

I'm not quite sure that people really want to have the kind of faith that Christ wants to give us. They may want the type of the faith that will help them out, that will benefit them –a faith that might heal themselves or a loved one, a faith that will help them pass a test, a faith that gives them assurance of eternal life; but do they really want a faith that will make them more Christ-like in sacrificial giving, in sacrificial loving, in sacrificial living, and in sacrificial forgiving? I'm uncertain if people really want this because it means being willing to change, it means being willing to allow the love of God to shape and transform us into servants who are

willing to serve unselfishly, unconditionally, and gracefully, kind of the way God helps us.

The parable Jesus told that we read this morning invites us to see ourselves in relation to God as servants -- in our work, in our church roles, in our leisure, in the unexpected things that come to us and it requires a response. It is an image that serves as a teaching function for his disciples, and for us, and its' purpose is to steer us away from any notion of entitlement, or reward, and to remind us that we don't earn our way into the kingdom of God but are granted entrance because of God's graciousness to us.

Because faith is more about God's ability than ours, it also means that God is the one who gets the credit. Jesus goes on to say that we ought not to think that our oftentimes busyness approach to ministry is going to get us the recognition we think we deserve. God is not looking for adrenaline—fueled junkie Rockstars of faith, but servants who do the simple stuff and who do “only what they ought to have done.” without seeking the head rush of a reward.

So, do you want to improve your performance as a disciple? Do you want to improve your “emotional status” and energy for serving others? Kill the quick fix buzz of activity; people-pleasing, or self-indulgence, and dive into the freedom of following Christ. All it takes is a little, just a little, bit of faith and a willingness to allow it to change, transform, and humble us. That's the real deal, the kind of energy we need! And thanks be to God for that. Amen.