

20th Sunday after Pentecost
"Lord Increase our faith"
Luke 17:1-10
10/06/13

I have a question for you this morning. How many of you would like to have more faith?
That's what Jesus' disciples asked for in today's Gospel. They said, "Lord, increase our faith"

We ask God to increase our faith because sometimes life is hard.
And we want to have more faith, but instead we are full of worry and anxiety.
And some worries keep us up at night,
Some just won't go away when the light goes out.

So what do you worry about?
Do you worry about things at work or at school?
Is it your health or the health of our loved ones?

Do you worry about money or some financial decision?
Anyone here worry about that one?

We worry about any number of things.
And we know we can't face these worries all by ourselves,
and so we say, "Lord increase my faith."

"Lord, help me trust, that you will get me through this,
that you will provide what I need."

And that's a great prayer. It's a faith-filled prayer.
And we need to pray like that.

But in addition to that prayer this morning's Gospel Reading gives us another reason to pray for more faith.

So, let's look at this passage together.
And I'd like to look at the verses around this passage and so I invite you to take out your Bible this morning and open it to Luke chapter 17.

This passage in chapter 17, comes from a longer section of Jesus' teachings.
But the immediate context really starts in Chapter 17 verse one.
Jesus said to his disciples: "Occasions for stumbling are bound to come."

Think about that for a moment.
Jesus is teaching and he reminds his disciples of how often we stumble
...how often we fall short of doing God's will, how often we sin against God and one another.

So the disciples are listening to this and they are starting to reflect on how often they sin, and then if their conscience wasn't already pricked, if they weren't already feeling the weight of their sin, Jesus says:

“Woe to anyone by whom these occasions to stumble come. It would be better if a millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea, than for you to cause one of these little ones to stumble.”

Jesus is just stating a fact: sin has consequences. Both personal consequences and communal consequences.

Sin doesn't just hurt us, it hurts those around us. And the “little ones” that Jesus is speaking of could include children but it also could refer to anyone who is vulnerable anyone who might be harmed by your choices.

We can all think of a time when something we said, or something we did came back to either hurt us or someone close to us. Sin has consequences.

Now look at verse three with me. Jesus continues His teaching by having us not only look at our own sin but also at what to do when others sin against us.

Let's read verses 3 and 4 together:

³So watch yourselves. “If your brother or sister^[a] sins against you, rebuke them; and if they repent, forgive them. ⁴Even if they sin against you seven times in a day and seven times come back to you saying ‘I repent,’ you must forgive them.”

Did you hear that?

“If the same person sins against you seven times a day, and repents seven times, you must forgive.”

How many of you would say that forgiving someone who hurts you comes easily?
How many chances do you give someone who burns you?
How many times are you willing to forgive the same person if they keep messing up?

Do you think that got the disciples attention?

Now look at verse five.

Knowing what comes right before it, doesn't that shed some new light on why the disciples exclaim: “Increase our faith!”

Jesus had just said, "When someone sins against you seven times, and repents, forgive them,"

Never let your heart grow cold.
Never stop forgiving. Never give up on someone.

No wonder the disciples said, "Increase our faith."

Wouldn't we say the same thing?
And then Jesus adds these words in verse six.

Let's read it together.

¶ He replied, "If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it will obey you."

One very interesting thing I learned about verse six this week, is that the literal translation goes like this: "If you have faith the size of a mustard seed... and you do."
In the Greek it's implied, "And you do."

So Jesus is not implying that they don't have faith.

He is saying, "you do have faith the size of a mustard seed...
and God can take even a little faith and do seemingly impossible things
...like forgiving someone who sins against you."

And remember it's not the amount of faith that allows us to forgive
but God's power in us, the Holy Spirit in us, that gives us that ability.

It's like a prayer I heard once.

The prayer goes like this: "Oh God, I don't pray for enough faith to move mountains or uproot trees. Dynamite and bulldozers can do that.
What I need and ask for is enough faith to move me."

On my own, my faith is weak, like a muscle that has been in a cast for several months.
But when we ask for God to work in us and through us, God brings our faith to life
and gives us the strength to move out in faith, to do His will in faith.

And so in the last three verses of today's Gospel
Jesus is connecting faith and obedience.

Because that's what a disciple is.
A disciple is one who hears what our master calls us to do, and does it.
We hear what Jesus calls us to do, and in His strength we do it.

The parable Jesus tells in verses 7-10 is about an ordinary master,
a man who makes commands and expects his slaves to obey.

And they obey out of fear.
Or they obey, because if they don't, they are expendable.

But that is not the way it is with us and God.
We are not worthless slaves.

We are each precious in God's sight.
We are dearly loved, more than we even know.

And all our sins,
past, present, and future have already been nailed to the cross.

Jesus redeemed us and forgives us
And heals us and now calls us to follow.

You and I have been called to follow Christ together.
Look what God has been doing, right here, in the life of this congregation.

We've been praying that God will increase our faith,
to be a Community in Christ, reaching out.

And God took that mustard seed of faith
the faith of everyone who served on the Transition team

and those who met with the Transition team,
and shared your hopes and dreams for Community Lutheran.

God took the mustard seed of faith
of those who served on the Call Committee
and all those who prayed for the work of the Call Committee.

And then God took those prayers, and He put us together
and called us to Walk with Jesus.

That's our theme this month.
And as we walk with Jesus today, we pray "Lord increase our faith."
"Walk with us each and every day in every area of our lives

So that through us, the light of the Gospel might shine
into the lives of everyone we know." Amen.