

Sermon for Proper 22C  
Sunday, October 2, 2022  
“Increase our faith”

Texts: Habakkuk 1:1-4, 2:1-4; Luke 17:5-10

I speak to you in the name of the one true God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Although the issue in this morning’s gospel reading asks about faith, the lesson for today is about discipleship. The lesson about discipleship offers the encouragement that a miniscule amount faith is sufficient; it’s the quality of faith that matters. The passage finds itself in Luke’s Gospel within a long discourse about what it means to be a good disciple that Jesus was teaching to his disciples while they were *en route* to Jerusalem. We’ve been going through the parables of this long discourse for the past several weeks, including the lesson we read last week about Lazarus and the rich man—a lesson that reminded us that good discipleship involves recognizing that God dwells in all of us and that we are all the image of God. Today’s gospel is sandwiched within several short statements of Jesus in which he says 1) that we should not be the cause of someone else’s sin; 2) forgive again, and again, and again; and, 3) discipleship is not about reward—discipleship is something we just do.

The disciples’ question immediately followed Jesus telling them to forgive as many times as necessary, even seven times in a single day. Perhaps they were feeling inadequate that they couldn’t live up to such a tall order, so they asked Jesus give them strength to manage such a tall order successfully. That’s something we can relate to. We’re familiar with commands to us like, “forgive everyone,” “love everybody, even your enemies,” “give to the poor,” “see God in all persons,” “see God in every living creature,” “love God’s creation.” We read it in the Bible and we hear it in sermons. There are many forms of good discipleship, and often it seems to be too much for our sinful selves to be able to do. The message from Jesus should help us recognize that although we are sinful, even though we are imperfect, capable of messing up, we can still people with faith, but he doesn’t want our faith to be stagnant.

Jesus offers these enigmatic words to his followers: “Who among you would say to your slave who has just come in from plowing or tending sheep in the field, ‘Come here at once and take your place at the table?’ Would you not rather say to him, ‘Prepare supper for me, put on your apron and serve me while I eat and drink; later you may eat and drink?’ Do you thank the slave for doing what was commanded? So you also, when you have done all that you were ordered to do, say, ‘We are worthless slaves; we have done only what we ought to have done!’” If such advice seems hard to grasp, you need to consider the first sentence of the lesson. The advice that Jesus gives to his disciples is his response to their request, “Increase our faith.” It’s not that they didn’t already have faith; they did. Jesus’s answer to their question challenged them take their faith to the next level, but faith on the next level wasn’t a matter of quantity, it was the result of a higher *quality* of faith. All we need to increase our faith is the tiniest bit of a high-quality faith.

How do we get higher-quality, stronger faith? That's probably the thing the disciples really wanted to know. And there is little *we* can do to get stronger faith. Stronger faith comes from the lived experience of God working in our lives. Our faith is expressed when we can make real-life connections to the presence and knowledge of God, and our confidence that he never abandons us.

The apostles, his disciples asked Jesus to increase their faith. His reply was that they had more than enough. With just the faith the size of a mustard seed, one can move mountains. On the cover of the bulletin, you can see about a teaspoon of mustard seeds. They aren't very big. You can fit twenty or more seeds inside the scale in the picture that measures 20 millimeters, or slightly less than an inch. The measure of our faith isn't quantifiable, but it is qualifiable. If our confidence in God is strong in the face of whatever life is giving us, then there isn't a mountain that can be a barrier to our getting from here to there. There isn't a sudden change in life, or the mistreatment from another, or a misfortune, or a tragedy that we can't get through and come out on the other side with stronger confidence in God's grace and mercy—with stronger faith.

The words of the prophet Habakkuk heard in the first lesson speak to this very point. The prophet was lamenting that he was witnessing violence, destruction, and injustice all around him, and God did not seem to be listening. But then God answers, and tells Habakkuk not to worry. "If I don't seem to be acting in the way or the time frame that you expect, don't worry. I'll act at precisely the right time. Just trust me. The righteous live by their faith."

I'm sure all of us would like to have more faith. We're no different from the disciples. By the goodness and grace of God, we have many models for how we can have more faith. Today, we're commemorating St. Francis and his love for animals by blessing pets after the mass. St. Francis lived a very austere, if not extreme, life in which he confided in God to provide everything he needed, even when he denied himself any pleasures of life. We have models in the saints of people who confided in God in the face of poverty, riches, hardship, and death. We would say that they had faith. We say that because we recognize how their experience of God made them stronger people. If we want to have more faith, we have to do the same. We have to remember how God has moved in our lives and have the confidence that no matter what we're going through right now in our lives, that God will not abandon us. No mountain can appear in our path that we can't climb over. Our faith might be as small as a mustard seed, but it is as mighty as the bush it came from. Let us pray to God that we will never lose confidence in him—that we may never lose our faith. Amen.

### Resources

"Commentary on Luke 17:5-10" in *The Working Preacher*,  
[http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=3028](http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=3028)

<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-27-3/commentary-on-luke-175-10-5>