

# 19<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost – OCTOBER 7, 2007

PYPS, Thanksgiving, World Wide Communion

## **Luke 17: 5-10**

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*The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!"*

*The Lord replied, "If you had faith the size of a mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it would obey you. 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!'"*

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### **A Little is Enough**

*The disciples say to Jesus, "Increase our faith!"* It is a desperate sounding plea. In the preceding verses, Jesus tells them just how difficult their work will be. He warns them against bringing harm to others in the community – commands them to correct and forgive one another. Jesus is stern and demanding with the disciples. He doesn't sugarcoat what the future holds. He doesn't pretend that their work and their life will be without setbacks and pain. Jesus scares the apostles with his direct talk. They fear the call of discipleship, which they have answered and accepted. They have chosen the path of Christ but instead of telling them that it will all go smoothly, Jesus assures them that there will be stumbling ahead.

*Give us courage, Lord. Make us able. Increase our faith!*

Sometimes I wonder if we have forgotten what our faith is about – did we ever really know? And have we forgotten what it is that God can accomplish?

Are we excited by our worship of the Lord or do we feel unsure about just what the good news of the gospel is? Are we burdened by life and by what is that God asks of us? We want to believe – we want to do what is right – we want to have the life God promises – we want...

But how can we possibly tackle the concerns of this broken world?

How can I feed the hungry?  
How can I clothe the naked?  
How can I bring peace to those around me?  
How can I spread the gospel of Jesus Christ?  
How can I forgive the people who have hurt me so badly?  
How can I accomplish any of it?

These are the concerns of the disciples also. They too are experiencing feelings of inadequacy and doubt. They feel that what they face in life – what they face as followers of Jesus – is too much for them, too much for their small faith to handle. They cry out to Jesus as do we, *Lord, increase our faith!* "Lord, help us believe enough so that we can do what it is that you have commanded us to do. Help us trust enough so that we can live as you say we should be living. Lord, take away our fear."

And Jesus answers in an unexpected way. He doesn't lay hands upon them and provide the faith they have prayed for. He doesn't snap his fingers and grant them a double dose of his Spirit. He tells them they have faith – even if it is the teeny tiniest amount – enough faith to do something as amazing as pull a huge tree out by its roots – enough to do something as unbelievable as planting a tree in the ocean. It is already enough and more.

With this assurance however, comes a stern reminder – “*Do you thank the servant for doing what was commanded?*” Although the disciples need no additional faith to do the work they have been called to do, they also can expect no thanks, no extra credit or compensation, regardless of how hard they work. Just as there is no increase in faith needed, there is no bonus grace offered.

We are servant people to a servant Christ. In that sense we are the slaves in the message from Luke’s gospel. Slaves because we have been bought and paid for by the life, death and resurrection of Jesus – nothing we do can make us more than that and nothing can make us less either.

The good news is that faith and grace are God’s free gifts to the disciples and to us. We do not need to ask for more faith – but only believe that we have all the faith we need for whatever we are called to do and be. Faith is powerful and present for those who will accept the gift. Grace is also a gift. We cannot expect grace as a prize for our good works – it is not a reward but simply a reality of relationship with the living God.

Discipleship is not a **transactional** relationship. This is not “Let’s Make A Deal.” We do not look at what we have been called to do, rely on our own strength and skill to accomplish that work and then hold out our hands for payment. If discipleship were that sort of relationship, we would all fail. Without faith, none of us has the resources to follow Christ and none of us earns the reward that has been given to us.

Discipleship is a **transformational** relationship. We are given gifts of faith and grace which change us because we know that they are given, not due to our own merit, but because God loves us. The gifts of faith and grace are the love of God at work in us that make it possible for us to participate, through Christ, in God’s divine will.

In our communion liturgy, we are invited to the Lord’s Supper not because of our faith or understanding, not because of our wisdom or wellness – we are invited because we trust in God and long for the relationship offered to us in Christ Jesus, because we know God loves us and we know we need God.

Paul insists that *God saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works but according to divine purpose and grace.* We are saved and called to discipleship through Christ. This is what we celebrate at our table today.

When we come to the sacrament of Holy Communion, we focus on the presence of Christ with us and in us – on the family of faith that comes from our relationship with Christ and, through Christ, with one another. On this World Wide Communion Sunday we recognize that Christians around the world share bread and wine at the table of our Lord. We emphasize the importance of solidarity in Christ. We must not cause others in the faith to stumble. We must correct and forgive one another within the whole Christian community because we are gathered around one table to share the one bread.

Communion is not only a declaration of our love or faith, it is a declaration of God’s love for us – God’s love which comes first and which we cannot earn. Today as we celebrate and remember God’s promises with believers around the world, we celebrate the glory of our oneness in Christ. We need to remember that faith is an immeasurable commodity, we will not beep or change colour or sport a halo when we have been filled with “enough” faith to live the life of discipleship to which we have been called. Even a little faith is enough. Let us pray...

*Now to the One  
who by the power at work within us  
is able to accomplish far more than we can ask or imagine,  
to God be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus,  
to all generations, forever and ever.*  
**Amen.**