


“Economy of Faith”
Sunday, October 2, 2016
20th Sunday after Pentecost

 **(Luke 17:5-10, CEB)**

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

The Lord replied, “You don’t need more faith. 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.”

“Would any of you say to your servant, who had just come in from the field after plowing or tending sheep, *‘Come! Sit down for dinner’?* Wouldn’t you say instead, *‘Fix my dinner. Put on the clothes of a table servant and wait on me while I eat and drink. After that, you can eat and drink’?* You won’t thank the servant because the servant did what you asked, will you?”

In the same way, when you have done everything required of you, you should say, *‘We servants deserve no special praise. We have only done our duty.’*”

This is the Word of God for the people of God.

Thanks be to God.

[2nd Service: *Affirmation of Faith*]

[MESSAGE]

Who here hasn't wanted more faith?

Isn't the idea for us to grow in faith as we worship and study?

I think we all want more – more of whatever God has to offer.

It's like the little girl who walked to the front of church to receive communion.

When the preacher gave her the little cup and a small piece of bread, she took it politely and ate it.

Then she looked at the preacher and asked, "*May I have more?*"

Maybe we all feel that way about Jesus – we don't want much, we just want more.

It seems the Disciples felt that way about their faith.

Jesus has just told them that being a faithful disciple is going to be a lot harder than they imagined.

The first disciples didn't feel up to the task and wanted a booster shot of faith.

So, we might not be surprised by Jesus' response.

The guilt in us, our own "lack-of-faith" experiences easily imagines Jesus pinching his thumb and forefinger together to indicate the tiny amount of faith really needed to do what God expects.

It's not so hard to hear this as judgement and to feel the sting of reprimand.

Let us pray...Lord, Paul told the Philippians, "*My God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.*" Help us to hear words of encouragement today that guide us toward trusting you more for everything we need. Amen.

So, we could listen to this story today; shake our heads, and go, "*tsk, tsk, tsk*".

We get it, don't we?

We see our own shortage of faith in this story.

We can remember the times we gave up too soon, or we didn't even try, or we became discouraged when it got too hard.

Each one of us can think of at least once when we felt like our faith was not enough to get us through "*whatever*".

We **could** do that this morning and take our medicine along with the Disciples.

But I don't want to be scolded today.

I want to imagine how Jesus might be using this story as a way of encouraging us to keep going in the face of "*whatever*" and believe that

"God's got this!"

"But my God shall supply ALL your need..."

(Philippians 4:19)

It seems to me that we have gotten into the habit of reading Scripture with an ear for everything God said **NOT to do**.

We have a knack for pointing out bad behavior, particularly other people's bad behavior,

and making sure they know that **God said**
that's not OKAY!

For a long time now some people have believed that
Christianity is **ABOUT GUILT.**

We make jokes about it. We own it. It's our *thing!*

But, this idea stands in the way of opening
ourselves up to people who have been hurt by
“church guilt” or blamed or shamed or sent
away.

It hides our loving God behind a pointed finger
instead of revealing God in the open arms of
unconditional love.

I think it's time we change our tone when we proclaim
the Word of God.

What if Jesus isn't scolding us in this story?

What if there is no “tsk, tsk, tsk”?

What if Jesus is a mentor and friend instead of
judge and jury?

Listen again to this conversation and hear kindness in
Jesus' voice and see the hint of a smile on his face.

“Oh, you don’t need more faith,” he says.

“Even this much (pinching his thumb and forefinger together) is enough!”

When we hear the love and compassion in his voice, we realize that Jesus is really telling us that we already have faith sufficient – grace sufficient – to do whatever is required.

“Don’t sell yourself short,” Jesus says.

“With **God’s help, you got this!”**

The parable that completes this text may be harder for us to hear, particularly if you are reading a translation that uses the word “*slave*” in place of “*servant*”.

We simply need to skip over the image that language conjures and move directly to the point of the parable.

From within the cultural context of Jesus’ time we see a relationship between master and servant that is based on mutual accountability and expectation.

The master expects the servants to perform their duties and the servants expect that when their work is done, they will receive nourishment, rest, and protection.

Jesus asks us to understand faith in this way.

Faith is a *way of life*.

Serving God is **duty**, but it is also **delight**.

It is about living life according to God's plan.

So, what Jesus describes here is living life with faith that God has expectations AND God provides all we need – and more – to meet those expectations.

To question whether you have enough faith misses the point.

The real issue has to do with how we use the faith we have to live *with* one another.

- How do we keep from leading one another into the valley of the shadow of death?
- How do we forgive one another, over and over again?
- How do we face losing our job?

- How do we spend one more day in a hospital or clinic or nursing home?
- Do we do these things because we have stored up some super-human reservoir of faith?
- OR – does God come along – everyday – and give us what we need to flourish in faithful community?

This “*economy of faith*” reminds us of Manna in the Wilderness.

It shows us a benevolent Master who not only expects us to obey, but also gives us all that is required to do so.

To me, that offers great encouragement.

When we see our faith this way we can better understand that we’re all in this together.

We all have questions, doubts, anxiety, and moments of weakness.

We all also have what we need to find answers to our questions and overcome our doubts.

Together, as a community of faith, we worship and study together.

Our faith is made stronger by the little bit each one of us brings to the table.

This builds a community not afraid to ask questions or express doubts.

We're allowed to show weakness.

AND we're not afraid to value mercy over fairness, or to forgive each other's failings – even when our patience is wearing thin.

God's economy of faith is lived out as obedience to a just and loving God.

We can trust the One with whom we share a relationship.

We give up the illusion that we can get through life on our own and realize that **faith can't be measured; only enacted.**

↓ When you begin to live within this economy of faith you will experience new levels of God's blessings.

There is so much peace to be found when you allow your little faith to move a mountain.

It does not mean there won't be MORE
MOUNTAINS...There **will be**.

It means that each mountain gets easier to move as
you give in to letting God multiply your faith.

Just imagine it:

“Oh, you don't need more faith,” Jesus said.

*“Even this much (pinching his thumb and forefinger
together) is enough to do anything!”*

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the
Holy Spirit. **Amen.**