

Faith Enough to Spare

Luke 17:5-10
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First Presbyterian Church
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Ron Rolheiser writes the following in his article titled “Gethsemane: The Place to Give Up Resentment” – “The world is not divided up between those who are burdened by duty and those who are free of it. ... The world is divided up rather between those who are burdened with duty and are resentful about it and those who are burdened with duty and are not resentful about it.”¹

We all have obligations in life, things we need to do whether we want or not. How we approach those tasks and responsibilities has a lot to do with our approach to God, how we see ourselves as servants of the Lord.

In today’s New Testament lesson, the apostles come to Jesus with a problem and a request. Their request comes when they say to Jesus, “Increase our faith!” Their problem comes from imagining how much faith it takes to be a follower of the Lord.

Just prior to our reading for today, Jesus had told them about the cost of discipleship – things like unconditional love and forgiveness, confession and repentance, being truthful and honorable always, loving God more than money, working on spiritual growth, maintaining religious practices, proclaiming the Gospel, and trusting in the Lord over the ways of the world.

The disciples are not sure they have enough faith to serve as they ought to, to do what the Lord asks of them. Well, we can relate to that. Everything and anything you do can be done in one of two ways – either faithfully or begrudgingly, with little appreciation for the struggles and blessings that come from being a follower of Jesus.

Ask yourself, how hard is it to serve the Lord faithfully in all you do? It’s not easy. Take for example the teenager who asks his parents to buy him a car. Seeing this as an opportunity, his dad agrees as long as the boy gets a job, gets rid of his long hair, and learns more about Jesus. A few weeks go by and the boy comes back to his parents and asking again for a car. The father looks at him and says, “Son, your hair is even longer than it was before!” The boy says, “Yeah, well I’ve been going to church lately and trying to be more like Jesus. Turns out he never cut his hair, he kept it long!” “Well do you have a job yet?” asks the father.

¹ Ron Rolheiser, "Gethsemane: The Place to Give Up Resentment," The Catholic Herald, March 18, 2005. <http://archive.catholicherald.co.uk/article/18th-march-2005/16/gethsemane-the-place-to-give-up-resentment>. Retrieved April 7, 2013.

“No, Jesus didn’t work,” says the boy. “He lived off what the disciples and the heavenly father provided for him. You want me to be like Jesus, don’t you?” “True, true,” says the father, adding, “You know, Jesus also walked wherever he went.”

It’s not easy to live in this world as a follower of Jesus. This is why the disciples say to him, “Lord, increase our faith!” This is why Jesus says elsewhere, “Come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden.” Jesus knows we are going to grow weary, he knows things will get discouraging, he knows we will struggle to live as followers of the Lord. And in response to this struggle, Jesus says, “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.”

In other words, we think it takes such great faith to live up to the Lord’s expectations. But Jesus says it takes faith the size of a mustard seed, which if you know mustard seeds, they’re only about one-twentieth of an inch, very small. With just a little faith, says Jesus, we can work miracles.

The single mother working overtime to support her child – she does this based on faith that it will make a difference. Same with victims of senseless violence trying to forgive the unforgivable, college students graduating with no job in sight, service workers and volunteers who show up day after day and the work’s never done – these are all examples of a little faith going a long way. How do people do it, how do you do it?

Well, no one who’s devoted to such selfless service does so apart from the promises of the Lord, the promise of better things to come, if we keep the faith and continue in service to the Lord. To make this point, Jesus uses the following example, saying, “Who among you would say to your slave who has just come in from ploughing 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?’”

Just image you’re the slave who spent all day plowing the field and tending the sheep, and now you’re dragging yourself into the house to fix someone else’s supper – no concern for yourself. Why would anyone do that; how does anyone do that? Only by faith and trust. We have to have faith in the Lord and trust that we have a place at the table, a place awaiting us when we’ve finished our work, our service on God’s behalf.

It was at the Table of the Lord that Jesus washed the feet of his disciples, having served them the bread and the wine. It was on the cross that Jesus forgave the unforgiveable, in the ultimate act of faith and trust. The only way we can serve as we are called to serve is by having faith in God and trusting that Jesus will one day greet us with those beloved words, “Well done, good and faithful servant.” There’s no other way to do what we’re called to do.

And there's no other reward, no earthly reward. We see that where Jesus asks us to imagine having a servant, saying, "Do you thank the slave for doing what was commanded?" The answer, of course, is no.

No one who serves the Lord does so for recognition or appreciation. Instead, we do it in recognition and appreciation, recognizing all that the Lord has done for us. This is why Jesus says to us, "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!'" Knowing all that the Lord has done for us. Faith is not about our ability to do the job, but rather God's ability to do the job through us, when we make ourselves available to God.

How much faith would it take for you to make yourself available to God today, this week? Do you have faith enough to spare – faith enough to spare the time, the money, or the energy it takes to serve the Lord?

It takes time to show a child you care. It takes faith to give to those in need. It takes compassion to visit with an older adult who's feeling lonely. It takes energy to go that extra mile when someone needs a helping hand. But that's how miracles happen – by having faith to go where you're called to go, give as you're called to give, serve as you're called to serve. And just how much faith does it take? According to Jesus, faith the size of a mustard seed – that's all it takes to be a blessing in this world through your service to the Lord. Amen.

PASTORAL PRAYER

Lord Jesus, let us always remember to give you thanks and praise every time we come together and share in the bread and cup. Let us always remember the depth of your commitment to us.

And come to us now, Lord we pray, to meet us with the word of compassion and gentle touch of care and concern for those areas of need in our lives.

We particularly pray your presence for those who are in need of healing, encouragement, strength and hope. We pray, also, for those devastated by Hurricane Ian and the storms it created. Send your angels of mercy to aid in the cleanup, restoration and renewal.

And for us, Lord, open our eyes to the miracles around us. Help us see your gracious provisions in the time of harvest, your refreshing care in the changing seasons.

Open our eyes to see that all are welcome at your table, for your love reconciles differences and your mercy celebrates diversity.

We pray all this in faith, as we raise our eyes to heaven and our voices in song, praying the prayer that you taught us, singing:

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts,
as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.**