

Spring Lake Presbyterian Church
Pastor: Rev. Kathryn M. Treadway
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Luke 17: (1-4), 5-10 (NIV)

Jesus said to his disciples: “Things that cause people to sin are bound to come, but woe to that person through whom they come. It would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around his neck than for him to cause one of these little ones to sin. So watch yourselves.

If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, “I repent,” forgive him.”

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

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.

Suppose one of you had a servant plowing or looking after the sheep. Would he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, ‘Come along now and sit down to eat’? Would he not rather say, ‘Prepare my supper, get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink’? Would he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do? So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.’”

Faith In Diversity

(Put apron on.)

(Punching the bread down) Luke’s gospel is always about reversals. The king of the world was born in a lowly manger. If you want to be great in God’s kingdom, learn to be a servant. So it’s really no surprise here that Jesus introduces us to a couple other reversals. It begins with faith. Faith the size of a mustard seed. Faith as teeny and as tiny as a miniscule mustard seed is capable of asking a mulberry tree to throw itself into the sea and watching as it does it. (or, as Matthew put it – asking mountains to throw themselves into the sea). Neither seems a very probable proposition. But leave it to Luke to reiterate those things that reverse power. Little things will do great things. Small, insignificant faiths will do the impossible.

So, before you tell me you must not have any faith because you’ve never asked a mountain to throw itself into the sea, I want us to talk a little.

I don't have a mustard seed today, but what I do have, since we are celebrating World Communion today, is some yeast. Perhaps for us I could reiterate Jesus' example with these teeny tiny particles.

This morning, I've decided to make 2 different breads – one with yeast and one without. Yeast are miniscule organisms that feed on sugars, so I added the yeast to the warm sugar water and watched as the froth began to grow. Then I added the yeast to the flour and my small ball of dough doubled in size, overflowing the bowl in which I had put it. Little things can accomplish big tasks according to the Gospel of Luke.

I didn't bring much to the table, just some flour, sugar, water, salt and oil. Many different parts, acting on their own. Yet with just a couple of tablespoons of yeast and a bit of time, the many parts were changed into something utterly desirable.

I also have here a different dough – again, flour, water, sugar, and oil, but this time no yeast. The end result is a flat bread – still beautiful and desirable, but flat.

Just as a little yeast makes a big fluffy loaf of bread, so a miniscule amount of faith can change the world. But we complain, like the disciples today, that we need more faith. We want God to give us greater faith. It's interesting that in Luke, the desire for more faith follows the command to forgive those who continue to sin against you. If someone sins against you once, forgive. If someone commits the same sin against you 7 times, forgive each time. The disciples request, in this context seems to come out of the rolling of the eyes that the disciples, in conversation with Jesus, were apt to give. Sure! YOU can forgive that many times, but you are Jesus – you are different than us. We're just regular, plain guys – flat bread! We can't do that. (“And let's be honest, the people whom we know and maybe even love who hurt us tend to inflict the same hurt repeatedly across the eyears. ‘Why is she ALWAYS like that?’ we ask about a mother-in-law [your son], a sister, a friend, a coworker. And the little adverb ‘always’ is apt: those who criticize you for your weight, for your clothing, for the kind of car you drive ,for your work habits, or for [the overall way you live your life seldom offer] such critiques just once!” <http://cep.calvinseminary.edu/thisWeek/index.php>) But Jesus asks us to forgive, and the disciples, in this context, ask for a little help. “You're going to have to increase our faith if you want us to do that, Jesus!” In other words – make it worth our while, Jesus!

But Jesus reminds the disciples, just as he reminds us, that we already have enough faith – we already have *at least* the faith of a teeny tiny mustard seed. We have *at least* the faith of a teeny tiny organism of yeast.

Jesus goes on to tell a story that seems a little odd to us because we don't have slaves these days, but they did during that time and Jesus knew they would understand what he was talking about. He asked – if your slave is working in the field all day and comes in – do YOU prepare dinner for your slave? No, of course not. You expect the slave, no matter how hard he or she has already worked, to do what is expected. You expect them to serve your meal at the appropriate time. And do you say thank you? No, because it is the duty of the slave to finish the work required of him or her.

In the same way, Jesus doesn't have to make forgiveness "worth our while." God doesn't have to increase our faith. It is our duty to forgive. We don't need a "well done, my good and faithful servant." Rather, we need to do what is required of us as Christians. "When Jesus talks about "faith," he's not talking about what you do in your head; he's talking about what you do with your hands and your feet, your wallet and your privilege, your power and your time. Faith in Jesus is not shown by saying or thinking things about him, but by following him." (Dylan's Lectionary Blog: Faith) And so, we forgive that mother-in-law, that son, that sister, that friend, that co-worker, that church member even if we are certain that they will turn against us yet again. And we do so with the faith that we have been given – the faith of a grain of yeast.

Because today is World Communion, I ask that we pay attention to the fact that we, in all of our differences, make up the body of Christ. There are mother-in-laws (hold up sugar), church members (hold up oil), people who have hurt you or others physically or emotionally (hold up white flour), people of different cultures (hold up wheat flour), people living in poverty and wealth, addiction and recovery, war and peace, disease and health (hold up the salt) and together we make up a dough. But we will simply be a heavy flat bread unless we recognize the miniscule faith that has been given to us by the grace of God (hold up the yeast). It is a faith that changes our substance, that turns us from separate entities into one bread. For when even a small amount of faith is added, we together become the body of Christ – alive and active in the world (hold up the loaf of bread).

Faith is found in relationship with God in Christ. As we join with the many other ingredients in our lives – those mother-in-laws, those people who have sinned against us, those people in other countries living vastly different lives than our own, we discover that the tie that binds us together, that allows us to grow into God's likeness, is faith itself, and that we, though many, are one body. "Jesus calls us into a community in which we are each freed to give freely of everything we have to give, because we're ALL sharing with one another as if all of our resources – money, power, time, and love – were unlimited. It's the sort of vision that some shake their heads at and call impossible. But nothing is impossible, Jesus says, with faith. Nothing is impossible when we realign our relationships as Jesus calls us to do; we find the power we need from the community – the communion – we find with Jesus and the body of Christ once we take the leap of faith to risk deeper relationship." (Sarah Dylan, Proper 22, Year C, 2004)

(take apron off)

Sing "One Bread, One Body"