

17th Sunday after Pentecost- Proper 22 (C)

Luke 17:5-10

Oct 2, 2022

Christ Episcopal Church

Towanda, Pa.

Rev. Betsy W. Sentigar

World Communion Sunday

When I was a little girl, my sister and I each received a gift from my father. It was a pendant with a tiny solid glass globe about 1/2 inch in diameter. Inside was a mustard seed. It was special to get a gift from my dad, especially a pendant. It was a gift of wonder as I wore it. As a young child with 3 older siblings, I was in a hurry to grow up, to catch up to them. My father observed this and would say to me, "Betsy" don't be in such a hurry. This time is for you be carefree and young. Enjoy your life right here, right now!

Being so young, I couldn't absorb his message. I never understood the symbolism of the mustard seed, yet this parable now brings back this lovely offering and a reflection of an unspoken prayer between parent and child, a gift of everlasting love and signifying a desire for us to live into the fullness of life, especially our Christian life. Isn't this Jesus' desire for all of us?

Who among us does not want more faith? Most of us are not surprised at the disciples' plea that Jesus give them more. There is a guilt-ridden part of us that is not particularly surprised at Jesus' scoffing reply. "If you had even this much faith," he tells them, pinching his thumb and forefinger together, "you would be able to do anything you wished."

It sounds as if Jesus' tone is sarcastic and demeaning in nature. But is it really? We are conditioned to read scripture with this kind of assumed tone. But, what if Jesus is not scolding the apostles at all? What if he is not clucking his tongue and shaking his head over their lack of faith, but speaking these words in a voice of encouragement and love, as one who would give up his life for his friends? For us? If we listen again to this exchange with these new ears, we hear Jesus answer the disciples with kindness, and maybe even a bit of a smile.

If we hear Jesus speak with the voice of love, we hear him telling the apostles that, in fact, they already have enough faith to do whatever is required of them. But why are they asking?

Jesus is assuring them that they have all the faith that they need. Now it's a matter of practicing it! In other words, to question whether one has *enough faith* is to miss the mark. The issue at stake is how we live together. How do we keep from leading one another into the valley of death? How do we manage to keep forgiving one another, over and over again?

We do it not because we have a superhuman reservoir of faith stored up, but because God gives us what we need to flourish abundantly in faithful community. In [this] *economy of faith*, we who serve depend on a benevolent master who not only expects us to obey but gives us all that is required to do so.

This view of faith saves the church from all sorts of missteps. In this divine economy, faith is less about personal fortitude and more about mutual forbearance as we keep on learning that we are all in this together. A community that lives out this sort of faith is not afraid to 1. ask questions or 2. express doubts or 3. show weakness; nor is it afraid to value mercy over fairness, or to forgive one another's failings even when patience wears thin. In this economy, faith is not stockpiled in a storehouse for the working of spiritual wonders, but is lived out as obedience to a just and loving God.

Sometimes isn't the whole idea of God was just too much to think about? As if trying to "get a handle" on God was like trying to kiss the moon? How can God be close to you (or you to God) when God seems so far away or not at all? . . . This is my answer to you: God is a mystery of humble love. It is a mystery that you cannot reason or try to figure out. You must simply live in the mystery. . . . and trust.

Trusting in the One with whom we are in relationship, we relinquish any illusions of self-reliance, acknowledging that faith cannot be measured, only enacted. In this economy of faith, we discover more than we dared to imagine about divine blessing. As we walk in God's ways together, we find that the God who expects much from us also promises much and that—wonder of wonders—the rightful master of us all came first and foremost not to be served but to serve (Matt20:28, Mark 10:45)

Remember where you came from our bishop remarked at yesterday's convention. Living stones was the "theme" from scripture. Take your identity out the door and don't lose a sense of it.

Reconciliation is our end goal. The beloved community starts with us in our forgiving, healing and expanding as modeled by Christ. As the churches thirst for hope and a better way we are challenged to make the way for a hurting and shifting world.

A closing prayer for activating the fruits of the Spirit:

Rushing breath of Love, you came into the upper room of the disciples long ago, calming their fears, encouraging their vision, and enlivening their ability to be people of valor, compassion and healing. You come into the Inner Room of our lives today, offering us this same transforming gift. Open what is closed within us. Breathe renewed confidence into our fatigued spirits. Send us forth with a passionate intention to be conveyors of our [indwelling] unconditional love. And may we move forward in the mind of Christ for the welfare of our world. Amen