



1616 W. Mequon Road, Mequon WI 53092
(262)241-3121 www.stjohnsmequon.org
Email: office@stjohnsmequon.org
Pastor James Tiefel
(262) 853-9723 (cell#)
Email: pastortiefel@gmail.com

The Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost

October 2, 2022

Faith in Christ Serves Others with Humble Gratitude

The faith that connects us to Jesus finds countless opportunities to serve people near and far. Such faith relies on Jesus' power, but our service often brings challenges and disappointments. In today's Gospel, Jesus encourages us to serve without the prospect of reward. With content and humble hearts, we do our duty to the Savior who served us with his life and death.

Sermon **Luke 17:1-10**

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

"If your brother or sister sins against you, rebuke them; and if they repent, forgive them. Even if they sin against you seven times in a day and seven times come back to you saying 'I repent,' you must forgive them."

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 has a servant plowing or looking after the sheep. Will he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, 'Come along now and sit down to eat'? Won't he rather say, 'Prepare my supper, get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink'? Will 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.' "

Christ Equips and Motivates You

If you tell someone to do something, it won't get done unless that other person is equipped and motivated to get it done. You can tell a man to build a house, but unless he's equipped with the proper training and knowledge, he won't get it done. You can tell a builder to build a house, but unless he's equipped with the right tools, he won't get it done. You can tell a builder to build a house, but unless you motivate him with a check or a good cause, he won't get it done. If you tell someone to do something, it won't get done unless that other person is equipped and motivated to get it done. Christ tells you and me to do quite a few things. Love your neighbor. Let prayers be made on behalf of everyone. If your brother repents, forgive him. These are just some of the things that Christ tells his disciples to do. Might you from time to time feel ill equipped or unmotivated to do what Jesus says? Christ has called you to the life you now live, life as one of his disciples. He does not leave you to equip yourself and motivate yourself to live as his disciple. Christ equips and motivates you to powerfully live a life of faith and to humbly live a life of service.

1. To Powerfully Live a Life of Faith

In these chapters of his gospel, Luke recorded practical life lessons that Jesus taught to different groups of people. In the previous few chapters these lessons were addressed to those who opposed Jesus, the Pharisees and the teachers of the law. To them, Jesus issued a strong warning against the dangers of the self-worth that they found in their wealth and the self-righteousness they found in their good deeds. We learned those lessons and applied them to our lives over the past few weeks. Jesus addressed this lesson, however, not to those who opposed him, but to those who followed him. He addressed people who had faith in him like Peter and John, like you and me.

Jesus began this lesson by setting before us the harsh reality we all live in. A problem plagues life as we know it. It infects our minds and causes our bodies to slowly waste away. It pollutes our desires and lays waste to the world around us. In the Bible, God gave this problem a name: sin. Jesus taught his disciples and today teaches you the harsh reality about sin: it is unavoidable, and it is gravely serious.

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

In the eyes of God, sin is the most offensive, most severe, most serious issue anyone will ever face. God speaks about sin this way because it is the one singular thing that separates you from him, that doesn't allow him to be with the people he created, the people he loves. Jesus taught such a severe truth with severe words. It would be better for someone to meet a horrible demise, dragged to the bottom of the sea, crushed, and suffocated by the increasing weight of the water above them, and pinned there to die with a heavy stone around his neck than for a little one to stumble.

And here's Jesus' command to you. Watch yourselves. Guard your character and your conduct closely so that you will not cause even one person with the weakest faith to stumble. Are you equipped to do what Jesus has told you to do? Are you motivated to do what Jesus has told you to do? Have you done what Jesus has told you to do? Woe to you who cause just one of the weakest of all people to stumble in their walk of faith. There are things that you do and things that you say that give offense to others, that cause others to sin, that make it harder for them to see that Jesus is the Way, truth, and life. Jesus identified such offenses as traps or stumbling blocks. Should one of us disciples who bear Christ's name cause another to stumble through our lack of compassion and care even for those with weak faith, it would be better for our lungs to fill with water rather than to be the one through whom Satan keeps another beloved son or daughter from their loving Father in heaven. This is the severity and seriousness of sin. And worse yet, this problem is unavoidable. Jesus said, **“Things that cause people to stumble are bound to come.”**

This is the harsh reality in which we live. We're going to sin against God. We're going to sin against each other. We're going to hurt others and be hurt by others. We're going to be on the giving and receiving end of the stinging offense of sin. But there is good news. Jesus knows this is your reality and he has not left you to struggle with it by yourself. Jesus equips you to do what he has told you to do. Christ equips you to powerfully live your life of faith with his Word as he gives you the blueprint for handling sin.

“So watch yourselves. If your brother or sister sins against you, rebuke them; and if they repent, forgive them. Even if they sin against you seven times a day and seven times come back to you saying, ‘I repent,’ you must forgive them.”

Here, Jesus gave us the blueprint for Christian living. Here, Jesus prescribes the perfect medicine to people sick with sin. He injects the two-step cure of law and gospel. He provides the life-giving inhale and exhale of repentance and absolution. He doesn't ask you to do anything he hasn't already done for you. If you sin against God, he'll rebuke you through the law. And if you repent, he will forgive you. Even if you sin against him seven times a day and seven times come back to him saying, “I repent”, he will forgive you. He has already forgiven you. Christ did all that his Father told him to do. Motivated by great love and compassion for you, Christ suffered the severe punishment for your sin to win forgiveness for you. Everything that you've said and everything that you've done that's caused someone else to hurt, all those things that you've brought before God and said, “I'm sorry. Please forgive me,” for all those things Christ only has one response. “I forgive you. See how I have forgiven you. See that your sins are covered. Go and sin no more.”

Christ has equipped you with the blueprints and motivated you with his love. With this, he sends you forth to powerfully live your life of faith. You're free to guard your character and your conduct as you show compassion for others. You're free to live at peace with one another as you ask forgiveness from and give forgiveness to one another. As we do this, don't we also find ourselves making the same request that the apostles made? **“Lord, increase our faith!”** the disciples asked. Jesus' answer to that request might surprise you. 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.”** As far as plant life in ancient Palestine goes, a mustard seed was among the smallest of seeds and a mulberry tree sent its roots as deep as any other. With this illustration, Jesus taught how much power is in just a spec of faith. Jesus responded to the disciples' request for more faith by getting them to think about the power of the faith that they already had.

The power behind your faith does not come from its size or its amount, it comes from the promises you trust. Your faith is in Jesus, the almighty God, your Savior. Every word he has spoken has come true. Every promise he has made he has kept. He has equipped you with your faith and motivated you with his love and promised that he is right by your side to help you as you live for him. Equipped with these truths and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, Christ sets you free to powerfully live your life of faith. Watch yourselves. Love one another. Apologize and forgive. Care for your neighbor. Powerfully live your life of faith and trust God to help you.

To Humbly Live a Life of Service

In the closing verses of this lesson, Jesus told a story for us to keep us humble as we live out our faith. **“Suppose one of you has a servant plowing or looking after the sheep. Will he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, ‘Come along now sit down to eat’? Won’t he rather say, ‘Prepare my supper, get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink’? Will he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do?”** Of course not! A servant doesn’t serve because he’s expecting thanks and praise. He serves because that’s who he is and what he does. Humble service is what’s expected of him. **“So you also,”** you disciples of Jesus, **“when you have done everything you were told to do,”** when you have powerfully lived your life of faith, when you have given your life in humble service to others for the sake of Christ, **“when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.’”**

Christ has equipped and encouraged you to live a powerful, amazing life of faith. You are capable of truly amazing things. You love. You forgive. You care. You live out your faith. You do this not expecting thanks and praise, but because it’s who you are. It’s who Christ has made you to be. It’s what you do as you humbly live a life of service to your Savior. By faith you will live and by faith you will overcome death and enter life everlasting. Then, when you see your Jesus for the first time and you tell him, “I’m an unworthy servant, I have only done my duty.” With tears of joy in his eyes and a tender embrace he’ll say those words you’ve been waiting your whole life to hear, “Well done, good and faithful servant!” We all long for that day. Until then, live by faith, humbly serve, and trust Christ to equip and encourage you to do so. Amen.

This sermon was preached by senior seminarian and St. John’s pastoral assistant Robert Beaver.