

Strength even in our weakness

Luke 17:5-10; 2 Timothy 1:1-14

So how many of you are sitting out there, both in your home or here in the sanctuary, and are experiencing feelings of shame, or feeling scolded, after you've heard the Gospel lesson today? How many of you feel that the passage is reminding you that you need to be more faithful? That you need to do more? The last line alone of the passage from Luke can leave you feeling this way when you hear, we are worthless slaves, we have done only what we ought to have done. And how many of you after having this initial feeling of worthlessness or failure to live up to the call of discipleship then began to think, wait a minute - this doesn't sound like the Jesus I know. The Jesus who is compassionate and loving, and forgiving and accepting of all people.

Kimberly Long, in one of the commentaries on this passage that I was reading, invites us to listen to this passage again, but not with the tone of Jesus shaking his head or you know waving a finger at us over our lack of faith. She invites us instead to hear Jesus' answer to the disciple's request with new ears. Where instead Jesus is speaking in a voice of encouragement and love. With kindness and a bit of a smile as He says, why do you need more faith? Even this (*holds index finger and thumb of one hand just a few centimeters apart*) little of faith, is enough.¹ The message today, I think, is that we already have enough faith. We have enough faith to do what God has called us and requires of us. Faith is truly a gift when it is given to us from God. What we need to do is trust in God and trust when God says this (*again - holds index finger and thumb of one hand just a few centimeters apart*) is enough.

I think it would be good to reframe the parable that Jesus shared so that we don't get caught up in how a post-modern world might view slavery, as something that is not acceptable anymore. We instead think about this parable that Jesus is speaking about a certain type of relationship. A relationship of, potentially a boss and an employee, for instance. Most of us work for someone. Most of us have someone that we are accountable to. And we know that there are clear expectations of what we are asked to do in our jobs. The owner in this story expects the workers to do their tasks. And after their work is done, the worker expects compensation for it. Now in the times of Jesus the workers would be fed, and given shelter, and the basics of life.

So, what does this tell us about our faith? "Those who serve God do so with a sense of duty and delight. Living a life according to God's commandments. We serve God and one another. Not to get bonus points.

¹ Kimberly Bracken Long, *Feasting on the Word*, Year C, Volume 4 (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), p. 142.

And not only because God expects it, but because we know that God has shown us the way to abundant life² when we do what we are called to do. What this passage is reminding us of, is that it isn't about whether we have enough faith or not, but we need to trust in, is that each of us has this much faith (*holds index finger and thumb of one hand just a few centimeters apart*) and together we have enough to live together with. If we live in the spirit of humility, which we have been talking about over the last several weeks, we not only consider other's viewpoints and their needs, as important as our own, but we also willingly serve others and accept help when we need it. We give our very best and trust that it is enough. The issue and point of this is to explore then how we will live together. Jesus is teaching us that faith is less about personal fortitude and more about a mutual forbearing to keep on learning that we are all in this together.

So how will, we, as a community of faith, tend to our faith? Remind each other that we have enough? Already have enough faith. How will we work together to serve God in this world? Remembering, as the choir so beautifully sang, we are not alone. Today is Worldwide Communion, which means it is the day where Christians around this entire world will come to feast at the table of Jesus. It's a day when we come together to remember what Jesus taught us and how Jesus lived out His faith. And how Jesus calls us to follow Him, and serve each other and the world, in love. Like the disciples we need to get out of our own way. To let go of our insecurities that stop us from serving God's world. As they sat there and looked at Jesus, and said, God can you increase our faith, we don't have enough. Again, Jesus's response was, you do have enough. Like the disciples, as I said, we need to get out of our own way. And in a few short weeks we are going to actually try this together.

We are going to get involved in a spiritual gift exchange. And I hope you will all be there as if it was Christmas, as if you were receiving presents and giving presents. In this spiritual gift exchange, we will take time to see what all of the ways this community of faith serves the world. All of the ways that we can share the gifts that God has given us, with each other and the world that we serve. There are so many ways. This place is rich and abundant because of all of the different volunteers and how they share their time and give their effort. This place would not be what it is without every single one of you. So, I hope that you will participate on October 23rd. And participate in discerning how God is calling us to serve and in what capacity.

Where might you, if you're doing five jobs, let go of one or two, in order to make space for others? As we were cracking the bowl today, I was thinking about how sometimes what we've always known and had - needs to shift a little bit. Maybe what we've always done and been a part of needs to - shift a little bit. And so by breaking it apart we can then reassemble it into a new way of being, to ensure that all people are a part of and involved in what we are doing. There are truly an infinite amount of ways that we can serve God and all are essential. So, please do not downplay the gift you've been given. For what you have is enough. How you use it, will be enough. The tiniest of faith can sustain and strengthen us to do all that is required, for we live in abundance here at Robertson-Wesley.

² _____, p. 142-144.

We are being called to not worry and to not give in to our doubt about ourselves. But as a faith community when we work together, we can do what seems impossible. When we trust in our abundance and actively serve one another we will accomplish more than we could possibly ask or imagine. We are being called to serve God, but first we shall come to the table where we be spiritually nourished, where we will ensure that we have reconciled with one another. So that there is an openness, an honesty, and grace for each of us to live out our call. And know that we do not do it alone. That we do it with all Christians around this world. And that is how God's kingdom will come to fruition. May we serve God and serve humanity with our whole hearts and minds, and spirits this day. Amen.