

Pentecost 17, October 2, 2022

(Lk 17:1-10; Ps 37:1-9; Hab 1:1-4, 2:1-4, 2 Tim 1:1-14)

Listen to these words Jesus said to his disciples: **If a 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. Then the apostles said to the Lord, Increase our faith!**

How much faith does it take to forgive? How much faith does it take to forgive someone you love for betraying or abandoning or hurting you? How much faith does it take to forgive your *enemies* who disagree with you, who act in hurtful ways, who do violence to you or someone you love?

Many parables, stories, and verses are basically the same in the gospels of Matthew and Luke. Matthew's parallel to today's text has Peter asking Jesus, **Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times? Jesus answered, I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.** –Do you have enough *faith* to do that?

*Forgiving* means that you'll no longer let the past hurt continue to control your own life in the present. It means giving up all hope of trying to change the past. It means living a new life in the present.

There's another difference in Matthew's parallel of today's text. Repentance isn't even mentioned. For the *sinner's* sake, it would be best to recognize the sin and repent of it—and remember, *to repent* means to stop going one way and turn and go another way. Without repentance, it's impossible to receive forgiveness. But with or without repentance of the sinner, for the *offended* party, forgiveness is a command, an obligation, a duty.

Jesus not only *taught* the need for forgiveness, he also *modeled* it. As he hung dying on the cross, one of the last things he said was, **Father, forgive them, they know not what they do.**

We don't know if those who crucified Jesus—the chief priests, elders, scribes and Pharisees—we don't know if they repented. We don't know if the Roman soldiers repented. All we know is that *Jesus forgave them.*

There are people we don't want to forgive. That's human nature. If I've been hurt, my reaction is often, *I don't care how sorry she is, I can never forgive her.* When I calm down, I might say, *I'll try hard to love my enemy, but no way can I forgive and forget.*

But Jesus says, **Forgive.** He taught his disciples to pray for forgiveness of their sins as they forgave the sins of others! If they weren't able to forgive others, they wouldn't be able to receive the forgiving mercy of God for their own sins.

- **Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.**
- **Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us.**
- **Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.**

That's a very hard thing to mean when you pray. So the disciples say, **Increase our faith!** *Give us more faith so we can be more forgiving.* They know they can't do it on their own. Their faith is too small to remove the boulder of anger, the infection of resentment, the hurt of pride, the sting of sin.

And what does Jesus say? **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.** Matthew's version would have them moving *mountains* instead of trees.

Obviously, the disciples *don't* have faith even the size of a tiny mustard seed—we don't see any mulberry trees in the sea, and the mountains are all where they're supposed to be. The disciples ask for *increased* faith, and Jesus points out that they haven't really shown *any* faith.

The good news of the gospel, the incredible good news of our faith is, God seeks, calls, and pursues all of us unworthy, unforgiving creatures because he sees us through the veil of divine love—he sees us as faithful disciples who *delight* in following every godly command—as loving children *brimming* with desire to forgive every wrong committed against us. (I think that must be some pair of rose-colored glasses our heavenly Father is wearing!)

Could you pray that prayer? could you ask Jesus to give you more faith? It'd be easy to ask for deeper faith to maybe give healing for yourself or a loved one, or faith that takes the worry out of eternal life. But do you really want a faith that'll make you more Christ-like in sacrificial giving? in sacrificial loving? in sacrificial *forgiving*?

One of my resources printed a prayer by an unknown author: *O God, I don't pray for enough faith to move mulberry trees or mountains. I can get enough dynamite and bulldozers to do that. What I need and ask for is enough faith to move me.*

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What might happen to us if we *really* prayed, **Increase our faith**? I invite you to come with an open heart and open mind to the answer to that prayer. Here in the body and blood of our dear and precious Savior you'll receive the entire forgiveness of all your sins. And that's truly the beginning of all faith.

Thanks be to God!