

**Pentecost 20**  
**October 2, 2016**

*"Big Challenges But Bigger Faith"*

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### **LUKE 17:1-10**

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**J**esus said to his disciples: "Things that cause people to sin are bound to come, but woe to that person through whom they come. <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> So watch yourselves. "If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. <sup>4</sup> If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, 'I repent,' forgive him." <sup>5</sup> The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!" <sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> "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'? <sup>8</sup> 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'? <sup>9</sup> Would he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do? <sup>10</sup> 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.'"

On a scale of one to ten how important is it for us to be there to help and support our brothers and sisters in Christ? Just let me be a one or two and lie low, take it easy and not get involved. There are some days we want to live our lives without putting ourselves out for others. Then there are those other days when we are very tuned into be there for others in the Body of Christ. We want to be a "10."

In the words we just read to you our Lord Jesus sets before us several challenges that will face us when we are right there in the front lines putting ourselves out for others. He speaks to us about the tough challenge of not causing people to stumble in their faith, the tough challenge of telling them in love when they have done something wrong, and the tough challenge of forgiving them when they have hurt us. And Jesus assures us with him as our Lord and Savior and faith even as small as a mustard seed we can rise up and meet these challenges as daunting as they might be.

### **The big challenges**

Jesus never hides from us how hard it will be to follow him and serve others. "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.'"

Things that cause people to sin are bound to happen. You cannot escape temptation. In the Lord's Prayer, we pray "Lead us not into temptation." Think of King David. One warm evening he stepped out on the roof top porch of his palace and saw a beautiful woman bathing herself. He acted on his desire and she came to him. The book of James says, "When tempted, no one should say 'God is tempting me.' For God cannot be tempted by

evil, nor does he tempt anyone, but each one is tempted, when, by his own evil desire he is dragged away and enticed." Last week we heard from our lesson from 1 Timothy that a love for money, an evil love for money, can be root source of all kinds of evil.

Things that cause people to sin will happen but we don't want to be the cause for their sin and even their falling away from the Lord. "But woe to that person through whom they come." Did Bathsheba purposely bathe herself in a place where she hoped the king might see her beautiful body? We don't know. But we do know that she contributed to David's downfall by complying with his request to come to him. She say as Joseph did, "How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?"

I don't want my sinful behavior to lead other people to sin. Look at the little children. One child gets angry and then the other responds in anger. The same thing is happening every day with adults also. One person gets anger and that anger leads the other person into the sin of anger. As a pastor I don't want any incorrect teaching of God's Word, or even any bad example to turn the hearts of people against the Lord. The mission statement for this congregation is "Shining Like Stars." Those words from Philippians chapter two are preceded by the words "Do everything without complaining or arguing..." If I constantly grumble and complain as if I have no blessings in Christ for which to be thankful, I could be setting a trap for others and causing them to stumble and fall. Picture the mean kid sticking his foot out and tripping up another kid. I don't want to be that person. It's tough because this is a challenge that goes on 24/7.

Should we just skip over what Jesus says should happen to his disciples who cause others to sin? No, we can't ignore these words this morning. "It would be better for that person 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." The Greek actually has the word "donkey" connected with the word millstone. The millstone pulled around and around with long pole and a donkey was a large stone that could grind a lot of wheat. How well could you swim with a millstone tied around your neck? Jesus wants us to take seriously this important challenge we face each day in our lives. We don't want to be the cause for other people to sin.

Now we have another tough challenge that will come up in our lives. That is the challenge of rebuking someone when they have done wrong. "If you brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him." One a scale of one to ten, how much to really want to get involved in correcting someone and telling them they are doing something that is destroying their life? I don't even like telling the waitress the truth about the food if it was not that good.

Think again of what happened in the life of David. Someone had to tell him what he had done wrong and lead him to confess his sin before God. He carried the secret sins of adultery and murder with him for almost a year. The Lord told the prophet Nathan what David had done and told him to confront him with his sin. Do you think Nathan had some concerns about the big challenge facing him since David had already justified his sin of adultery and murder? What would keep David from taking Nathan's life to hide his carefully guarded secret.

People have a hard time seeing where they have done wrong, and so do we. They need

help. They need someone who loves them enough to lead them to confess their sin. When they confess their sin, they need to be told their sin is forgiven. That's what Nathan did with David. When David confessed his sin, Nathan absolved his sin with the words, "The Lord has put away your sin." In Matthew 18 Jesus said, "If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over." The night of his resurrection Jesus told his disciples: "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven." How hard it is to tell someone who is holding on to a sin that their sin cannot be forgiven.

A family is gathering together. They decide to make a big pot of soup with lots of good vegetables. One brother saw some beautiful mushrooms growing in the park across the street. He gathers them and brings them in, washes them, and is just about ready to put it into the soup. One of the other brothers notices this and shouts, "Stop, those are poisonous mushrooms." There are lots of poisonous mushrooms growing in all of our lives. We need our brothers and sisters in Christ to band together around us and lead us to confess our sin and find forgiveness in Christ Jesus our Savior.

Another big challenge we face in life is forgiving people who come to us and tell us they are sorry for hurting us. "If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, 'I repent' forgive him." In the Lord's Prayer we not only ask the Lord to forgive us, we also ask for help to forgive those who have hurt us. "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." Think of all the times you have had to say "I am sorry."

In the book *The Hiding Place*, Corrie Ten Boom describes how she lived with a smoldering anger for the Germans after WW2. At one of her lectures about surviving in a concentration camp, she met one of the guards who had beaten her sister Betsy. He came to her and asked for her forgiveness. Anger welled up in her when she saw his face. Then she remembered Jesus praying, "Father forgive them for they do not know what they were doing." Her hands went out to his and she said, "I forgive you." It is only in Jesus that we find forgiveness of all our past sin, and only in Jesus that we find the strength to take on the big challenges of forgiving others, showing their sin and not causing them to fall into sin.

### **The bigger faith**

The disciples ask Jesus to increase their faith to meet these challenges. What Jesus offers them is so much better than increasing their faith. He offers them faith in himself. "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." Imagine being able to say to large mulberry tree or large oak tree with deep roots, "Be uprooted and be planted in the sea." If Jesus gives us a promise then we can take him at his Word and believe that promise whatever it may be. Even when our faith is small like a mustard seed it holds on to something very powerful and very large. It holds on to Jesus. He was able to uproot every sin of your life, past, present and future. He took your sin upon himself and destroyed it at the cross. Our faith may be weak, it takes a hold of Jesus.

A few years ago a family and another group of people were hiking on a trail near Buena Vista, Colorado. There was a large rock slide. Rescue crews came on the scene and saw a hand sticking out of the rocks. Grace Johnson, 13, was the only survivor. All the others from her family along with several others died. She told how her daddy, Dwayne Johnson, jumped on top of her to protect her when the rocks came tumbling down. Gracie was small for her age, but still she survived only because the body of her daddy saved her. Our hope of being saved and reconciled with our God is found only Jesus. It is also in Jesus we have the strength to move mountains and uproot a mulberry tree and meet the big challenges life brings. Grace's middle name just happens to be "Grace Faith Johnson." That's a nice name.

To help us appreciate what a privilege it is to have big challenges that are met with an even bigger faith in Jesus, our Savior tells the story of servant who works hard in the field and works hard at tending the sheep. Then he comes home and instead of being served, he prepares a meal for his master. He doesn't expect some special treatment or special reward or special trophy for what he has done. He does his duty because that is what he does. So we join in saying this morning with Jesus' words, "We are unworthy servants we have only done our duty." All these big challenges facing us each day don't seem overwhelming to us when we are doing what Jesus wants us to do with the faith he gives us in him. This faith enables us to know the past is all forgiven and to know that strength awaits us for the future. As Paul said in Philippians, "I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength." Even faith as small as a mustard seed can take on the greatest challenges life has to bring because the object of our faith is always Jesus. Amen.