

**Luke 17:5-10**

**October 2, 2016**

***“Increase Our Faith!”***

Terrence Johnson had great difficulty working with our Gospel Lectionary Reading when he was preparing to write a sermon on it. He decided to write the author of the Gospel of Luke a letter and it became his sermon. He wrote, “Dear Luke, You’re a terrific writer, and through the years I’ve become more appreciative of your Gospel (along with your second volume, The Acts of the Apostles).

(PAUSE) There's a wonderfully human touch to your writing, even in the midst of the mysterious. Your story of the birth of Jesus is a masterpiece; and our churches have listened to children read it for many Christmases. Your inclusion of the parable of the Good Samaritan is a literary jewel. And the resurrection appearance to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus is one of the most intriguing and touching of the post-resurrection stories." (PAUSE)

Johnson continued, **“I like your Gospel, Luke; but I’m having some real difficulty with your little parable about the farmer and his slave. It’s not exactly a heart-warming story, nor is it a mountain-peak experience of Bible reading. (PAUSE) How could you write something like that?!”**

(PAUSE) “Look again at how you end it, man: ‘When you have done all that is commanded you (pause) say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done what

was our duty.” Johnson concluded, “Now doesn’t that sound like a real downer!”

(PAUSE) (Terrence Johnson as reported in “What Can I Get By With?” by Maxie Dunnam found in sermons.com)

Our Scripture Reading is somewhat strange. It has two basic parts, which don’t, on the face of them, have much connection with each other. In that first section, we receive the request of the disciples and then a response by

Jesus. However, our Savior's words don't seem to be responsive to the stated need of his closest followers. (PAUSE) Then, in the second portion of the Scripture, Jesus taught them to be humble and faithful servants. Strange, (pause) how does everything fit together? (PAUSE)

**When the apostles made their request of Jesus in verse 5 they said, “*Make our faith greater.*” (PAUSE) My reading of the**

Gospels has led me to perceive the original disciples were somewhat slow to recognize and understand (pause) the nature of Jesus' purpose and ministry. They did not seem to have much recognition of their own responsibilities as his disciples. In other words, they often missed the point or went against their Lord's ways. (PAUSE) Given that context for understanding the basic responsiveness of the disciples to Jesus' teachings and instructions, I suspect their

request for Jesus to make their faith greater (pause) was for purposes other than the ones Jesus had intended. Yes, they most likely wanted him to increase their faith, so they would have greater power, authority, and prestige. (PAUSE)

Vince Gerhardy put forward the type of thinking many people today would most likely associate with the disciples' request of Jesus. Gerhardy wrote, "If it is my faith that moved

the mountain, then the bigger the mountain the more faith I would need to move it. (PAUSE)

The bigger the obstacle the more strength I'd need to climb it. (PAUSE) The more serious the illness (pause) a faith even greater would be required to overcome it. (PAUSE) The more serious the sin (pause) the more faith I would need in order to have it forgiven.”

(PAUSE) **Gerhardy explained, “That kind of thinking kind of makes sense, but (pause)**



**that’s not how faith works. In fact, faith doesn’t do the work at all. And thank God for that.” (PAUSE)**

Gerhardy elaborated, “God is the one doing the work through faith.” (PAUSE) He continued, “Think of faith as the key that opens the door to God acting in our lives.

(PAUSE) If I have a bigger key ring than you do, does it matter? (PAUSE) The size of a key ring doesn’t matter - key rings don’t open

doors (pause) but it's that little key on the ring that opens doors. Even a little faith opens the door for God to move the mountains and trees and even our hearts." (PAUSE) (Vince

Gerhardy, "Faith the Size of a Mustard Seed")

Keeping Gerhardy's insight in mind, let's look again at what Jesus gave as his response to the disciples' request for greater faith. **In verse 6,**

***"The Lord answered, 'If you had faith as big as a mustard seed, you could say to this***

*mulberry tree, 'Pull yourself up by the roots and plant yourself in the sea!' and it would obey you.'”* (PAUSE) That tiny amount of

faith seems to be extraordinarily powerful!

(PAUSE) So, what did Jesus mean by that

answer to his disciples? (PAUSE) Perhaps,

his point was (pause) receiving God’s Gift of

Faith was enough for them and us! We don’t

need to have some extra amount to enable us

to fulfill our discipleship! Faith is not

something you or I can earn. We receive it by

the Grace of God – our Divine Parent  
convinces us of God’s Agape Love for us  
through God’s Son’s death and resurrection  
(pause) to prove it to us. (PAUSE)

Considering the nature of faith, Audrey West  
said, “Faith is persistence in reaching out to  
Jesus (Luke 5:17-26) and trusting in Jesus’  
power and authority (7:1-10). Faith is  
responding with love to forgiveness received  
(7:44-50), not letting fear get the upper hand

(8:22-25), and being willing to take risks that challenge the status quo (8:43-48). Faith is giving praise to God (17:11-19), having confidence in God's desire for justice (18:1-8), and being willing to ask Jesus for what we need (18:35-43). (PAUSE) ("How much faith does a person need?" a Commentary on Luke 17:5-10 by Audrey West posted on [workingpreacher.org](http://workingpreacher.org))

Ok, (pause) we don't earn Faith (pause)  
because it is God's gracious gift, so, (pause)  
how does it relate to verses 7-10 of our  
Scripture? (PAUSE) Why does Luke seem to  
report those verses, as if they were connected  
to the request of the disciples for greater faith?  
(PAUSE) Let's consider **verses 7-10**,  
*“Suppose one of you has a servant who is  
plowing or looking after the sheep. When he  
comes in from the field, do you tell him to  
hurry along and eat his meal? (PAUSE) Of*

*course not! Instead, you say to him, ‘Get my supper ready, then put on your apron and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may have your meal.’ (PAUSE) The servant does not deserve thanks for obeying orders, does he? (PAUSE) It is the same with you; when you have done all you have been told to do, say, ‘We are ordinary servants; we have only done our duty.’”*

(PAUSE) Now, if I was correct in my assumption that the disciples wanted greater

faith, so they would have more power, authority, and prestige, then these words of Jesus would be very humiliating for them.

(PAUSE) He would have come pretty close to crushing their hopes and expectations!

(PAUSE) Will Willimon has a slightly different insight, for he explains, “I think Jesus might have been saying, ‘You want increased faith? (PAUSE) Then keep at being faithful.’ (PAUSE) Put another way, ‘You



get more faith not by closing your eyes, trying  
real hard to feel or to believe something.

More faith comes through faithful living.

(PAUSE) Just do it; your faith will be  
increased, not as a personal achievement, but  
as a gift of God.” (PAUSE)

Willimon explains, “God loves us enough to  
give us rituals, sacraments, practices, habits  
that – in the doing – God graciously uses to  
increase our faith.” (PAUSE) Willimon

concludes, **“Being a Christian is not simply believing a set of ideas; it’s taking up a way of life and, in living this way of life, we are brought closer to God, that is, our faith is increased.”** (PAUSE) (“God increase our faith in God?” by Will Willimon on the September 29, 2013 by The Hardest Question)

You and I don’t need God to magically spread some pixie dust on our faith to increase it.

**Instead, as we live out our faith – our trust**

**and commitment to our Divine Parent and  
Jesus Christ, (pause) our experiences of  
agape love, sacrifice, suffering, and  
forgiveness (pause) will deepen our Faith  
Relationship with God and the Son of God!**

(PAUSE) Continuing to deepen our service  
and commitment to God and the Church – the  
People of God, will lead us to grow in our  
Faith Relationship with our Divine Parent.

(PAUSE) Thus, our increased Faith does not  
enable us to express greater power, authority,

and prestige for ourselves. Instead, it enables us to be better servants of our God and the Almighty's Purposes of Agape Love and the New Faith Relationship with God and All People. (PAUSE) **Let us share in the Sacrament of Holy Communion with a greater sense of our benefitting from God's Agape Love, Gift of Faith, and (pause) our call to live out in unity (pause) our Faith (pause) in our daily lives, as we live agape love toward all people, especially the**

**forgotten, the outcasts, and the rejected by society.** Yes, Lord, enable us to have our faith increase through our living it out in our daily lives together. Amen.