

Discipleship in the Lectionary – 10/02/2022



A look at the week's lectionary through the lens of discipleship and disciple-making.

Revised Common Lectionary Year C

Sunday, October 2nd

Luke 17:5-10

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Discipleship - Just do it!

This week's Gospel lection is contained within a short text block that falls between the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus and the account of Jesus cleansing ten lepers. This short text block contains Jesus' teaching on what may first appear to be loosely connected discipleship themes as he is traveling to Jerusalem: Do not cause others to sin (17:1-2), the obligation to forgive again and again (17:3-4), a tiny amount of faith is all that is needed (17:5-6), and do not expect any earthly reward from being a disciple (17:7-10). The latter two teachings are the content of this week's lection. Despite difficulty with the grammar and imagery that does not work too well in our 21st century world, we are left with a refreshingly simple exhortation about discipleship - just do it.

Luke 17:5-10

⁵ The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!" ⁶ And the Lord said, "If you had faith like a grain of mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it would obey you.

This teaching is presumably connected to the previous text where Jesus commands his disciples to continue to forgive a brother even if he sins against them and repents repeatedly. Maybe the apostles find this teaching too difficult and ask Jesus to increase their faith ("faith" could also be rendered as "belief" or "trust"). Many commentaries note that the grammar here is difficult. Jesus is either encouraging his apostles not to be concerned about how much faith they have since only a little (the size of a mustard seed) is all that is needed. Or Jesus is admonishing them for their lack of faith by implying that if all they had was the faith the size of a mustard seed... but they do not! Clearly, proximity to Jesus is no guarantee of faith. Perhaps a good summary here is just have some faith!

⁷ "Will any one of you who has a servant plowing or keeping sheep say to him when he has come in from the field, 'Come at once and recline at table'? ⁸ Will he not rather say to him, 'Prepare supper for me, and dress properly, and serve me while I eat and drink, and afterward you will eat and drink'? ⁹ Does he thank the servant because he did what was commanded? ¹⁰ So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.'"

These next four verses do not initially seem to connect to those earlier, but they will! The imagery Jesus uses here challenges us since the concept of master-slave (bondservant in this case) is alien to us in our culture. We are further stretched with this passage since the prevailing view in our culture is to expect a trophy for merely

participating. To us, "good job!" is considered negative feedback! "Great job!" means we performed as expected! "Outstanding job!" means performing slightly better than expected! Yet as God's servants, we cannot expect to exceed or even meet our obligations. This lectionary text addresses such an example. When we look at the whole passage together including what came before, we are to repeatedly forgive a brother (17: 3-4) because by God's grace we have indeed been forgiven an enormous debt which we could never repay. Therefore, our duty to offer repeated forgiveness to our brother demands neither excessive faith nor should it merit recognition.

Reflections

Sometimes we over-complicate Jesus' teachings on discipleship. This week's lectionary text is refreshingly simple. Discipleship - have a modicum of faith (belief/trust) and attempt to do what is commanded! We do this with a humble heart knowing that we are unworthy recipients of God's grace and thus we are unworthy servants merely striving to do our duty. The only complicated thing here is the excuses we come up with when we choose to do otherwise!

