

Habakkuk 1:1-4,2:1-4

Luke 17:5-10

2 Timothy 1:1-14

“May we commit our way to the Lord;
trust in God, and God will act.” AMEN!

Oh my! More cheery advice from Jesus, right?

I find myself asking,
“What’s wrong with him?!?”

Doesn’t he know that you can win
more followers with honey than he
can with vinegar?

Jesus should have taken a course in
pastoral care at seminary!

The Jesus in the Gospel of Luke could
take some lessons from Mr. Rogers and
from Barney (the purple dinosaur)
about making people feel special.

On top of the lulus he gives today,
we are wise to recognize how often
this lesson is taken out of its context and
then used to preach a message of
shame to people.

Lessons to admonish people.

As if we should throw out every thing we know
about Jesus and assume this is the Lord's intent.

No, it is us pastors and priests, who
feel the need to twist it in ways that
convince folks that things could have
been better if they'd just had a bit of faith.

Saying harmful things like healing could
have occurred if you'd had
a tiny fragment of faith.

Or your grief could have disappeared if you
had just a pinch of faith.

These statements are terrible ways to interpret
what Jesus was saying and doing.

But, unless one spends time in the text, and
reads or has someone to teach about
the thematic material, then it's easy
to be led astray.

So, we look for the context, and our
boundary markers are:
the story of the rich man and Lazarus and
the problems that come from loving
money above all else, and
next week's lesson on the

healing of the ten lepers,
which is about giving
thanks.

Within these markers, we find the connection of
this text about “mustard-seed-sized faith”

and then we can come to appreciate Jesus’
honesty about the demands of discipleship
without seeing them as ways to shame us.

And, when the Son of Humanity spoke
this message of truth about discipleship
we discover it is impossible for scandals
or stumbles to not come.

We should expect to stumble on
the words from Jesus, for the truth of them
is shocking and world rule breaking.

Jesus did not warn his followers nor
does he warn us to not make mistakes or stumble.

The warning is to not be the one who trips up
others on their walk of faith.

Warnings to not be the one who fails to
be hospitable and forgiving, and

Not be the one who fails to minister as
Jesus would.

This is the warning here.

Doing or saying things that trip up
another's faith journey would be like setting out
a rock in the path so that someone would trip,
fall, and be hurt by it.

Thankfully, we have some examples from Luke
to illustrate what Jesus meant.

At the feeding of the 5,000.

The disciples wanted to send
the people away hungry.

But that would have given the crowd
a reason to mistrust Jesus, so he did
something about it.

He fed them.

In the account where Jesus
was rejected hospitality, the request was

made by a few disciples to call upon fire
to rain down upon the Samaritans but

that would have closed the possibility
for ministries of inclusion and healing to
come later to that community,
so Jesus said no.

And there are other examples like this
where people who follow Jesus
become impediments for others
to come to him.

The church can be its own worst enemy.

Look, it is impossible to live life...
to follow Christ and to not make mistakes.

There is grace and forgiveness in our failures.

There will be times when we'll be quick
to judge and slow to forgive;

occasions when we are less hospitable and
more faith-less;

times when we feel that trusting human beings
is better/safer/easier than trusting God.

What we hope for is that Jesus would say,
"That's alright!"

You tried and it worked out pretty good...
Only 10% were hurt and distrust
God because of it.”

Or we hope that he'd give us the proper
prayer asking for forgiveness since we are
truly so sorry about the outcome.

But, instead, Jesus said, “It would be better
for us to drown ourselves.

Better to tie this huge millstone around
our necks and go for a swim.”

In shocking hyperbole, it is not literal,
but an exaggeration to make a point,
Jesus stresses how deadly serious he is
about mission and purpose in Jesus'
name... so that God can be trusted.

About the “doings” of faith, how
even doing small things of faith and trust
lead to huge landscape improvements.

There are no times when it is acceptable
to be less than forgiving, less than compassionate,
and less than hospitable. (Pause)

We spend so much time here because this is

the context for why the disciples ask Jesus
for more faith.

They recognized how difficult it was
to follow Jesus and prayed for strength
and asked for trust and faith to do it, but

then Jesus flipped their honest plea on its ear.

Christ is concerned about
the motives of our prayer requests.

In our consumer driven, capitalistic society
we want things like faith to be quantifiable.

We pass the blame from ourselves saying,
“If I’d only had more faith.”

We think we can sock a little more faith
into the bank each year, right?

But with Jesus’ challenge of our choices and
the consequences from them, we discover
that faith is something that you do, and
faith is something I do.

Faith is not something a person has “more of” or
“less of” like a balance in your bank account.

Faith is something we do.

So, how do you exercise your faith?

Sometimes it is good to rethink basic assumptions.

Better yet, it is always good
to rethink basic assumptions. (Pause)

There's a recent poll out that found
there's an 85% increase in the population of
the United States saying people want
to know more about Jesus.

It is at an all time high.

But, guess what?

There's an all time low for the percentage of people
to want to know more about the church.

This is the result because the church,
on a whole, has lost its ability to follow Jesus;
to be Jesus; to show Jesus.

Much of the church has forgotten
the scandalous message revealed in
the story of God's love for humanity.

The story of God's love revealed in Jesus.

For too long, the church has put a collar on Christ
and made regulations for who's in and who's out.

And people have lost their trust
in the institutional church.

No wonder Jesus made an exaggerated statement
it'd be better to have a millstone tied
around the deceiver's neck.

No wonder the disciples asked for more faith
and forgot that faith is tied to what we do.

Be assured, St. Stephen...
we are working to overturn this by
building our muscle faith in action and
finding ourselves turning back to God.

Coming to God with critiques and
with frustrations, and with anger,
like the prophet Habakkuk.

The world is not as it should be;
we can cry out, "Where are you O God?!"

Yet somehow... someway...
between all of us... even in an imperfect church,

there is a least a speck of faith.

And from it... miracles are made.

AMEN!