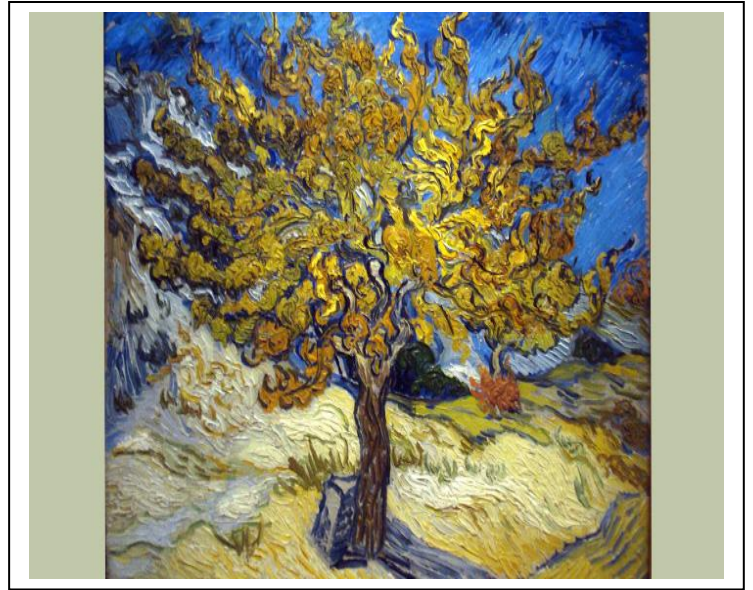


Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father, through our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Luke 17:5-10 (EHV)

⁵The apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our faith.”

⁶The Lord said, “If you had faith like a mustard seed, you could tell this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and it would obey you.” ⁷Which one of you who has a servant plowing or taking care of sheep will say to him when he comes in from the field, ‘Come at once and recline at the table’? ⁸Won’t the master tell him instead, ‘Prepare my supper, and after you are properly dressed, serve me while I eat and drink. After that you may eat and drink’? ⁹He does not thank the servant because he did what he was commanded to do, does he? ¹⁰So also you, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, ‘We are unworthy servants. We have only done what we were supposed to do.’”



Dear Heavenly Father, send us your Holy Spirit so that we may have faith to do the things you ask without expecting any reward, through your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

If any of us have ever wanted more faith or a stronger faith, it’s usually in response to something. After all, we don’t normally go about our daily tasks and suddenly think out of the blue: “Ooh, wouldn’t it be wonderful to have more faith!”

Likewise, when we hear the opening words of the gospel reading for today, the disciple’s request for more faith is because they’re responding to something which made them conclude they needed more faith than what they had.

So, what led to their request for more faith?

Well, after Jesus had told them the parable about the rich man and Lazarus (which we heard last week), Jesus warned them people will become trapped in sin.

This news is bad enough in itself, but Jesus then seems to indicate there’s something even worse than being trapped in sin, and that’s leading someone else to sin.

He says it would be better for someone to hang a huge stone around their neck and throw themselves into the ocean than to cause someone else to sin.

So, what advice does Jesus give us for dealing with those who are trapped in sin, or for those who cause someone else to sin?

He says: “If your brother (that is, your fellow Christian) sins, rebuke him. If he repents, forgive him.” (Lk 17:3)

Ok, so far, so good! Tell sinners off and forgive them when they say ‘sorry.’ This doesn’t seem too hard, does it?

But Jesus didn't stop there. He kept going!

He also said: "Even if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times returns to you and says, 'I repent,' forgive him." (Lk 17:4)

This is much worse than the seventy times seven we've heard elsewhere, because that would only be about four hundred and ninety times (even though we know that number wasn't literal)!

Think about it.

If Jesus says you need to forgive someone seven times every day, and there's three hundred and sixty-five days in a year, that would be two thousand, five hundred and fifty-five times a year! Multiply this by how many years old you are and how many different people you know who might be trapped in sin or who may lead someone to sin, the number of times you'd need to forgive those around you would very quickly rack up into the millions and trillions of times!

Guess what the disciple's said to this remarkable teaching about forgiveness by Jesus?

"Increase our faith!"

They realised that none of us have it in us to forgive all the people around us who are trapped in sin, or who lead others to sin, or who hurt us, especially if they're serial offenders!

After all, we don't want to forgive! We want to rub their noses in their sin. We want to publicise their sins on social media or in our gossip groups. We want to avoid those who sin against us. We want to hurt them for what they've done. We want to see them suffer for their crimes. We want to withhold their forgiveness until we're absolutely convinced they're incredibly sorry for what they did!

Forgive them? Again, and again, and again, every day?

We figure it takes faith, and lots of it, to do what Jesus tells us to do!

Since only God can forgive sins, we need a lot of help from God to do what he's commanding us to do. We can't, and won't, do what he asks under our own power or out of our own meagre pools of love and mercy. God not only needs to authorise us with his own divine authority to forgive as he forgives us (which he does), but we figure he needs to equip us somehow with enough faith to carry it out.

So, how much faith do we need to forgive someone?

Well, not much, apparently.

Jesus gives the example of how much faith we need to rearrange the garden by telling a tree with a deep root system to uproot itself and toddle on down to the sea and settle itself there.

At first glance we might reckon the tree will do what we ask *only if we have enough faith*. But this would be rubbish! After all, Jesus tells us we could do this if we only had as much faith the size of a mustard seed, which is a pretty small seed.

What Jesus is trying to tell us is that it's never about *how much faith* we have but *on whom we're placing our faith*!

The tree is never going to do anything for us based on our faith *in ourselves* and how much faith we *have*. Neither will it do anything based on our faith *in the tree* having the ability to unearth itself and walk around like Treebeard in the Lord of the Rings!

Remember that we're to fear, love, and *trust God* above all things. We're to have *faith in him*.

God is the only one who can get trees or mountains to do anything, so we're to have faith *God* will do what he promises to do.

Therefore, if we're convinced that God himself has commanded us to tell a mulberry tree to go jump in the lake, or the sea, then we do it, *trusting God will do what he says*. It will do so, not based on how much faith we have, but because *God will do what he says he'll do*.

Again, it's the same with our forgiveness. We're not forgiven only if we have a big enough faith, but we're forgiven because we believe God has the will and power to forgive us our sins.

Similarly, none of us are going to heaven because we have a big enough faith or because we've done enough good things in our life. Instead, we're confident we'll go to heaven because we trust God has promised in his Word that all those who believe in Jesus Christ and what he's done for us already belong in heaven.

Applying this back to Jesus' command for us to forgive everyone multiple times a day, we don't need much faith to do so! We simply believe *this is God's will* that he wants us to forgive people their sins. Those sins, no matter how deep rooted they are, will be removed from them, by God, as far as the ground on which they stand is from the sea, or even better, as far as the East is from the West.

Then, to keep us from being tempted we'll be rewarded for trusting God, for doing good things, and for forgiving people's sins, Jesus tells another parable with the point that just because a slave does what he or she is told to do, this doesn't mean that he or she should expect a reward.

This isn't how God works.

God doesn't work on a reward system. He works on a grace system. And the grace system works by faith.

This means, even when we do the right things, such as forgiving every person in our life for all the ways they hurt us, seven times a day, for the rest of our life, we're not to expect God will reward us in any way.

We're all unworthy servants doing the works God has created us to do through faith. And the good works he's commanded us to do is to believe in God and to forgive those who are caught in sin, those who lead others to sin, and those who sin against us. We're to keep on forgiving because we believe this is what God tells us to do, and we're only doing what is our duty.

You don't need more faith, but you may need to be strengthened in the faith you have or to be better equipped for your faithfulness.

The Holy Spirit will strengthen your faith and equip you for works of faith. He does this through God-given means.

Firstly, he feeds the good deposit of your faith through your ears.

As you hear the Word of God, the Holy Spirit works away at your own stubborn roots established in your hearts to expose your own sinfulness. He'll expose the way you've become trapped in sin or have led others to sin. The Word of God will also lead you to trust God and what he says. So, when God speaks his words of forgiveness for your sins, cleansing you for the ways people have sinned against

you, and establishing peace between you and God through the death and resurrection of Christ, you're to believe it. Because that's what faith does – it believes God does what he says he does.

Secondly, God strengthens and equips your faith for service through your mouth.

He invites you to regularly sit at his own Holy Table where your Lord and Master himself prepares a meal for you. You receive the precious and holy gifts of Jesus' body and blood through faith, believing here you receive forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. You eat and drink these holy gifts because you believe you've been commanded to do so. Here as you eat and drink Jesus strengthens your little seeds of faith so you can do what he tells you to do.

You don't need any more faith; you just need that saving faith to believe Jesus is your Lord and Saviour who forgives all your sins and commands you to forgive others as he's first forgiven you.

And if you ever think the meagre deposit of your faith needs strengthening, you're to run to his means of grace and pray: "Lord, I believe, help my unbelief." Amen.

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Pastor Stuart Kleinig
South Burnett Lutheran Parish
17th Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 22)
5th October 2025