

The 17th Sunday after Pentecost  
“God-given, saving, good work producing, mustard seed faith!” Luke 17:5-6  
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October 5, 2025  
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Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.  
Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, our text for this 17<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost is from  
Luke 17:5-6

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

**6 So the Lord said, “If you have faith as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be pulled up by the roots and be planted in the sea,’ and it would obey you.”**

So far the text:

Who is Jesus speaking to in our Gospel reading? The opening verse tells us. **“Then He said to the disciples”**. Jesus is speaking to believers in Him which includes the apostles as we just heard them as **“increase our faith”**. Jesus is speaking to people who have faith. How strong is their faith? How strong is your faith, disciple of Jesus? That is what Jesus wants to reveal in each of us. He wants each of us to examine ourselves, do a self-check and take note of how strong our trust is in God.

Because that is what the essence of faith is...trust in God...not self, not in princes.  
That’s what we read last week from Psalm 146.

**“Do not put your trust in princes, nor in a son of man, in whom there is no help. His spirit departs, he returns to his earth; in that very day his plans perish. Happy is he who has the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God, Who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them; who keeps truth forever,”**

Sometimes you may hear people say “you gotta have faith”. And many times they are meaning that you gotta believe in yourself that you can accomplish what you want to do. Or you sometimes see baseball fans or other sports fans hold up signs with the word “Believe” in big letters. You gotta believe that your team is going to win it all. You gotta “keep the faith”, trust in what got you this far, and hold onto it. Until of course, the final

out says differently and your team exits the playoffs. The word “faith” is used a lot in ways that have nothing to do with a relationship with God.

Most often, it’s about a relationship with yourself. You gotta have faith in your abilities to get through a hard situation. You gotta have faith and not lose confidence in yourself and not let yourself down.

Well, the Christian faith is not a self-help seminar to bring out the best of your inner you. It’s actually the opposite. For the Christian, the disciple, the believer in Jesus, first of all acknowledges that our “inner you” can’t be rehabilitated, only crucified daily.

A Christian can’t put trust in oneself because our sinful nature lets us down so often. Again, Jesus is talking to disciples here. He’s talking to you and me in our Gospel when He says:

**“It is impossible that no offenses should come, but woe to him through whom they do come!”**

When Adam and Eve fell, it was because they wanted to be like God, not trust in Him. Our sinful flesh which we have inherited, that is, our original sin, continues to offend in what we say and do. That’s why we confess our sins every Sunday. That’s why we confess them to each other. They are so grievous because Jesus says they can cause little ones to be offended...young Christians, those immature in the faith can be led astray by witnessing and accepting sinful living as normal.

Kids follow what we do not what we say. If it’s acceptable for mom and dad to live in unrepentant sin, then the little ones will believe it’s ok. Jesus answer? A millstone attached to a rope around the neck. The offense needs to be removed and severely punished so that a little one doesn’t fall into the same trap. **“Take heed to yourselves.”**

But Jesus doesn’t leave a Christian destitute for one’s many offenses. For He offers through faith in Him, something that we could never, ever achieve or accomplish. Forgiveness.

As soon as Jesus rose from the dead, He gave His disciples who were gathered in a locked room with very little faith, exactly what they needed. Renewed faith. Renewed hope that Jesus had not lost the battle on the cross. But through His suffering and death, He had defeated what we could never defeat...sin, death and the devil.

Jesus appears to the disciples and shows them His hands and says, “Peace”. There is peace now with God. Your sins cannot condemn you for I have taken them all away by my death. What was impossible for man, I have accomplished for all people. The world is forgiven.

And then Jesus gives this precious gift to His church – the Office of the Keys.

**“Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.” And when He said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.’”**

There are two ways to handle sin and only two ways. 1. Forgive them. 2. Retain them. Forgive them when there is repentance. And retain them when there is no repentance.

Let’s handle the second way of handling sin first...the retaining of sins. It means to keep sin on that person who has offended. It doesn’t mean to forget about that person and the sin that was committed. It doesn’t mean to ignore that person...don’t talk to that person...or worse yet, play god by thinking you have the power to withhold forgiveness. God never wants forgiveness to be withheld. 70x7. Infinite forgiveness needs to always be given.

But before forgiveness can be given, and it must be given, never withheld, a rebuke of sin leading to repentance must first happen. This is what Jesus plainly says in our Gospel reading. We can’t skip over this little word “rebuke”. For that is the work of every Christian...to rebuke sin.

**“If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him.”**

Here is the tough work of being a disciple. But the rebuking is done purely out of love so that the soul is not lost forever in the torments of hell like the rich man in the account we heard last week. You have Moses and the Prophets to hear. And God’s Word...God’s Law must be spoken over and over again with gentleness until a sinning brother acknowledges the sin and repents.

That sin that is retained, until there is spoken, “I’m sorry. I’ve sinned against God and you” can now be forgiven...over and over again...infinite times when there is repentance.

The Office of the Keys gives every disciple this amazing gift and power to use over and over again. Forgiveness. What you forgive on earth is forgiven in heaven.

And if there is no repentance, then the sins are retained on earth and most sadly in heaven. For those sins keep a person from ever entering heaven!

What was the disciples' reaction? What is your reaction? The disciples saw how difficult it is to deal with an offending brother or sister and simply said.

**“Increase our faith.”**

What great faith is needed by the Christian to do his or her calling in correcting and forgiving another. It's not easy. The world says that you can't judge me. No, I'm not judging, God's word is judging. Hear Moses and the Prophets before it's too late.

What great faith is needed by the Christian to remember that I am saved sole by the grace of God, sole by the merits of Christ without any worthiness in me. I am not better than my erring brother or sister, but I want my erring brother to know the peace of God by acknowledging sin and then receiving full pardon.

**Ephesians 1:7**

**In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace**

Without acknowledging sin, there can be no pardon.

In **Psalm 32** David said: **“I acknowledged my sin to You, And my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,” And You forgave the iniquity of my sin.**

How difficult is your work, yes, your work to restore a brother? How difficult was it for Nathan the prophet to rebuke and then forgive David. It requires mustard seed faith.

**6 So the Lord said, “If you have faith as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be pulled up by the roots and be planted in the sea,’ and it would obey you.”**

Without faith it is impossible to please God we hear in Hebrews 11. And we see the impossibility of rebuking and forgiving sin without faith in your heart. It's as impossible as telling a mulberry tree to be pulled up by the roots and be planted in the sea.

Well, Jesus is not asking you to do this impossible task, but to have a simple trusting faith in the gifts that God has won by the death and resurrection of Jesus...and use them. He does the impossible...Jesus forgives sins through you!

For God wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth...the only truth – righteousness through Jesus.

This was the light that God shone to Luther in the reformation when sins were not being forgiven but being paid for with indulgences.

Luther read Habakkuk 2:4, our Old Testament reading, and clung to it.

**“Behold the proud, his soul is not upright in him; but the just shall live by his faith.”**

It’s all about one’s soul, whether it is found just and righteous before God. And that can only happen by faith in God. Through faith in Jesus, a person acknowledges one’s unrighteousness and depravity and trusts in the righteousness of Jesus. It becomes his or hers through faith. It is sealed to you in your baptism.

Baptism is not our telling the world that I have chosen to follow Jesus at some arbitrary age of accountability. You are powerless to do, captive in sin. An unbeliever can’t choose God! An unbeliever is an enemy of God. You can’t uproot yourself from the devil’s power and replant yourself in God’s kingdom! Impossible!

The disciples once asked Jesus...**“Who then can be saved?”**

**26 But Jesus looked at them and said to them, “With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.” (Matthew 19:25-26)**

Saving faith is a miracle. Your miracle. That your sins are washed away in your baptism. It is a miracle given to you through faith that you receive the very body and blood of Jesus for your forgiveness in the Lord’s Supper. It is your life, your duty to constantly confess your sins before God, receive His forgiveness and then become His servant to your brother that he or she would do the same by the power of the Holy Spirit. All praise and glory to our Triune God who has given us such treasures to such unprofitable servants. Amen

**And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” Amen. (Philippians 4:7)**