

Psalm 37:1-9

Do not fret because of the wicked; do not be envious of wrongdoers, for they will soon fade like the grass, and wither like the green herb. Trust in the Lord, and do good; so you will live in the land, and enjoy security. Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him, and he will act. He will make your vindication shine like the light, and the justice of your cause like the noonday. Be still before the Lord, and wait patiently for him; do not fret over those who prosper in their way, over those who carry out evil devices. Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath. Do not fret - it leads only to evil. For the wicked shall be cut off, but those who wait for the Lord shall inherit the land.

Luke 17:5-10

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

"Who among you would say to your slave who has just come in from plowing or tending sheep in the field, 'Come here at once and take your place at the table'? Would you not rather say to him, 'Prepare supper for me, put on your apron and serve me while I eat and drink; later you may eat and drink'? Do you thank the slave for doing what was commanded? So you also, when you have done all that you were ordered to do, say, 'We are worthless slaves; we have done only what we ought to have done!'"

Sermon

A woman carrying her first child goes into labor. In the hospital the contractions begin to come harder and harder and after one particularly difficult contraction the woman looks over to the nurse and asks, "Is the hard part over." The nurse look back at the woman and said, "I'm sorry honey, but this isn't the hard part. The hard part comes during the next 18 years."

Friends, becoming a Christian is not the hard part. We are saved by grace alone, not by works. We baptize infants who are not yet able to speak their faith because we believe that it is God who names us and claims us as God's own. The hard part isn't becoming a Christian, the hard part is living for Christ from that day forward. The hard part is the discipleship.

It is much harder to live by grace, learning to forgive any and all who repent. Even if someone sins against us seven times a day, and seven times the person turns back to us and repents... forgiveness is hard. Fool me once... Fool me twice, it is on me. It is easy to become cynical, to find ourselves believing someone is not worthy of forgiveness. But we are not called to sit on the judges seat. We are called simply to forgive when someone says they are sorry.

Forgiveness is hard, and so is hospitality. Jesus calls his disciples to welcome the outsider, the sinner, the one on the fringe. And all of a sudden that *love your neighbor* bit takes on a whole new difficulty. It was much easier when our neighbors were people who looked like us, talked like us, people who were part of our culture because then we didn't have to change. When we only love people who fit in, then all we really love is ourselves. But welcoming the outsider, the one who doesn't fit in - well that means we have to be open to differences - open to change. And that is hard work.

And the challenges of staying true to the faith. Jesus recognizes that everyone will have to struggle with stumbling blocks along our path, but he warns us that we must be careful to not become a stumbling block for others. We have a responsibility to teach through our words and our lives the love of God that we experience in Christ Jesus. Discipleship is hard because it means we have a responsibility to hospitality and to charity, to serving our neighbors and serving God. And then Jesus tells us that we do it as slaves, or better for our ears, as servants. Servants who should not work for reward or honor, but servants who work because that is their job, that is their calling.

Discipleship is hard stuff, and the apostles realize how hard it is and they ask for something that I think we all might ask for. If we are called to do this hard work Jesus, then please INCREASE OUR FAITH! Give us more confidence, more understanding, more hope in God's plan for our discipleship. It seems reasonable, seems like an appropriate request. But Jesus' response takes us all back.

“If you had faith the size of a mustard seed, you could command this tree to be uprooted and planted in the sea!” Oh yea of little faith, yea of no faith. It sounds as if Jesus is saddened by the disciples lack of faith to start with. But maybe, just maybe, Jesus was not speaking in condemnation but in affirmation. Faith, as small as a tiny mustard seed, is enough to do amazing things, and your faith is greater than a mustard seed. Your faith is more than enough.

And maybe just maybe it isn't about our faith at all. Maybe all this time, we disciples are concerned about our faith, about our belief, our confidence, our knowledge, our ability to do what God has called us to do. But maybe all this time we have gotten it wrong. Maybe, just maybe, instead of questioning our faith in God, we should be remembering God's faith in us. Maybe, just maybe this difficult discipleship becomes a little easier when we realize that God's faith in us is what encourages, gives hope, and allows us to welcome the stranger, forgive the sinner, and serve God in thanksgiving.

At the Table, we remember that Christ took bread and took a cup, he broke it/he poured it out. And in doing so Jesus shared his faith with his disciples. Take and eat of my body, take and drink of my blood. Take my faith, my good news, my grace. Take my ministry and make it your own. For I have faith in you, and so you have all the faith you will ever need. Now be my disciples in the world. Thanks be to God for his unwavering faith.
Amen