

Pastor Jon's Sermon from Sunday, October 2, 2022, based on Luke 17:5-10.

“Mustard Seed Faith”

We are always planting seeds as Christians. We never get a day off as servants of Christ.

Sometimes the seeds we plant attract others to the faith, and other times, they are a stumbling block:

Like the time I threw my golf club in golf league this year. I was having a good round going... even par after three holes. Then I hit the ball in the water on a par three and proceeded to throw my golf club. I never do this. But for some reason, I lost my mind that day. Not a good witness as a pastor. I felt so bad. So the next hole, I couldn't go on until I gathered everyone together on the next tee box and apologized for my poor sportsmanship. They were gracious and forgave me.

So before the famous Mustard Seed text in our Gospel for today, Jesus says, there are plenty of times in life when you will stumble. And we know this story to be true on a daily basis. But Jesus says, “woe to you if you cause others to stumble.”

Then I hear Jesus saying, “It is better for you to have a millstone tied around your neck and to be thrown into the sea than for you to cause one of these little ones to stumble.”

A millstone is like a giant stone donut used to crush grain into flour. If it were around your neck, you would sink to the bottom of the sea immediately. And little ones could be a child, someone who is marginalized, someone new or considering the faith. In other words, Jesus doesn't want the disciples to be a reverse witness... What you say and do matters, whether in public or private, or on the golf course. For us humans, that is a lot of pressure.

2nd Jesus says, “if another disciple sins against you, you must rebuke the offender, and if there is repentance, you must forgive. Even if a person sins against you 7 times a day and says I repent, you still must forgive.

The part we normally forget is going directly to the offender. How often do we go and tell 5 friends first, start a gossip network or whispering campaign, but never directly talk to the person who offended you? Then all of this festers under the surface. It kills community. More likely than not, the person offending you doesn't even know they hurt you. And if you confront them, and they immediately apologize, then forgive them. If they try to defend, justify, and explain and are unrepentant, than don't forgive... it may take you and them some time.

The problem is that the apostles' didn't think they had enough faith to live this out. Can you see why they asked Jesus to "Increase their faith?" This is hard stuff. It is hard to live in community led by Jesus.

But Jesus says, you got this. Jesus responds with, "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." 1st century hearers would think this is impossible. Did you know that a mulberry tree's root system were known to be so extensive that they were not to be planted within 12 yards of a cistern?

The Good News here Jesus is saying you do have enough faith.

The original Greek has two meanings for the word "if". One "if" is conditional like if you eat your broccoli then you can get your ice cream. But the "if" in our Gospel is an "if" according to a fact. It would read like this, "If you had faith the size of a mustard seed (and you do)... then you can uproot this mulberry tree."

So Jesus is actually affirming the disciple's faith already and inviting them to live out the possibilities of their faith. You only need a small amount of faith or trust in God like a mustard seed to do great things, and you have it. Our Savior's used this concept of a mustard seed for the building campaign, and look where we are today, in this awesome space that continues to improve.

Finally, there is the rest of this text about being a servant of Christ in verses 7-10. Once you are a servant you are always a servant. There is no vacations to stop and boast about doing what you are commanded by Jesus.

This was written in a time when people had slaves, which is problematic today. If your household slaves were working hard in the field all day doing their job, would you invite them to the family table and give them a night off from serving dinner...which was their job. They didn't have take-out in those days. No, they would continue to do their job inside the house of serving the meal. Jesus says, don't expect to be thanked for doing your job as one of his servants.

I think Jesus is saying, that as one of his followers, we don't have the luxury of saying, "I have completed my service; now I'm done and want to be served."

We don't get to take a break from trying to live exemplary lives, to offer unlimited forgiveness to those who repent, and to constantly grow in our discipleship.

Knowing that we are imperfect human beings, this seems impossible to live up to, but thanks be to God in Jesus Christ, who gives us mustard seed faith as a gift of the Holy Spirit. Any time we hear the Word of God, the Holy Spirit awakens and creates faith in us. And our faith is grounded in a God who has shown us the way of the cross. There, Jesus forgives us generously, and he demonstrated what servanthood looks like.

Finally, we are in a community of believers. And sometimes we need to rely on others faith when we seemingly don't have any. We need to pick each other up, pray for each other, weep with each other, and forgive each other. Our collective faith can do great things. Amen