

“Please, Sir, We Want Some More”
17th Sunday after Pentecost – Oct 2, 2022 – Luke 17: (2)5-10/C

Every time I read today’s gospel, I think of the opening scene in the movie version of *Oliver Twist* called **Oliver!** It’s a dark dining hall with rows of long tables. The orphans have just finished their paltry bowls of gruel, and little Oliver walks the entire length of the hall – bowl lifted up between his hands - and politely requests an additional serving. “*Please, Sir, I want some more.*” **MORE?!** the cruel headmaster thunders. And we all cringe on Oliver’s behalf.

These days we are faced with many cringe-worthy moments in our lives: We look in disbelief at our political landscape. We watch the world population diminish through disease and war and hunger. We are being fed on images of need and want and feel guilty about having so much at the same time it doesn’t feel like nearly enough. So take a moment to ask yourself, “*What is it that we need **more** of?*” (More time? More sleep? More money?) What would you be able to do - that you can’t do now - if you had **more** of that? I feel a little guilty just reflecting on that question. But it is timeless.

Today, the disciples ask Jesus for more: *Increase our faith.* Why? To what end? For what purpose? we might wonder. But they have just heard a review of Discipleship 101, their “job description.”

1. Don’t cause others to stumble, especially little ones (not too hard)
2. It’s your job to rebuke those who’ve been sinning; (could be fun)
3. You must forgive those who repent (even if it’s over *and over.*)

We’ve faced some difficult terrain ourselves, lately, just as the disciples were, as they traveled with Jesus toward Jerusalem. They had witnessed amazing miracles and healings; they’d heard major debates with religious leaders and experienced confrontations with authority and power. And no matter how often he was warned, Jesus insisted on a dangerous path, and laid out their relationship that would not be easy. So, understandably, they ask for an increase in faith (almost desperately,) “*We want **more**; we **need more!***”

What would it look like to have **more** faith? A sense of God’s presence every time you worship? The strength to survive life’s challenges? A way out of struggling with hardship all by yourself?

We all probably *want* more faith, thinking that might get us closer to God - because deep down we know there is something more that our hearts yearn for. Haven’t we all asked for more faith at one time or another? Maybe not in those words, but with a “*Help me out here, God*” “*Can’t you just give me sign?*” or “*I can’t do this alone!*”

And in those transparent moments we get a glimpse of how God comes to us through faith. It’s not about understanding more, or learning more, or anything that you can do with your intellect. Faith is all about the heart – the emotions - and most of us do not live out of our guts, but out of our heads. Why? Because sometimes, you can actually control your **head** - you can be practical and cautious, you can be wise and disciplined. But your emotions are unpredictable and often happen without warning. Your heart “falls” in love, it doesn’t “decide” to love (mysterious, miraculous, uncontrollable.)

Think about how effective our emotions are in forming bonds and sustaining relationships. The disciples had each walked away from something - left behind homes, families - everything familiar - all that they possessed. **Why?** Because Jesus called, and the Spirit planted in them a tiny seed – called faith. As a kid I wondered just what was it **exactly**

that drew folks to follow Jesus? My childlike answer: it must have been something about him - his teaching, his compassion, his faith - something in his eyes (as in *love at first sight*.)

You know, having preached and taught about God, faith, grace, and salvation for a long time, I have found that sometimes words just wear out. So, I always look for new ways to enliven old words – other words that make more sense and help me feel in my heart what I know in my head. This might have been what the disciples wanted when they asked for MORE faith, just needing to feel a little more confident about what they knew. I think I have found a good stand-in for the word, **Faith** - an “understudy” as it were - ready to step in and take someone else’s role at a moment’s notice. Let’s just agree to think the word “trust” when we hear the word “faith” for a bit; and see if it works, see if it moves our hearts.

Remember the stories of faith we have heard all our lives. Now put yourself there and use the word “trust” instead of “faith.” Recall the Centurion’s whose servant was healed. He said, *“I also am a man under authority with soldiers under me who do what I say...I say to my slave do this and the slave does it.”* Jesus was amazed and said *“In no one in Israel have I found such **trust**.”*

Or the bleeding woman whose faith compelled her to simply reach out and touch the fringe of Jesus’ garment to be healed. To her Jesus declared, *“Daughter, your **trust** has healed you.”*

Or a blind beggar crying out to Jesus for mercy – *“Receive your sight; your **trust** has saved you.”*

Or to Peter, sinking after walking toward Jesus on the water; he reaches out to catch him, *You of little **trust**...why did you doubt?*

Or whilst teaching in a house, a man is lowered down through a hole dug in the roof by his friends, and when Jesus saw **their trust** he healed the paralytic.

What first drew the 12 might have simply been being chosen –invited to join some elite adventure. But trust grew daily as he loved them, just as they were. He fed them, he forgave them, he taught them, he valued them, he listened to them. Every interaction bonded them more. Every experience strengthened their relationship and satisfied their doubts because they TRUSTED in him. They believed in him, the same way Jesus believed in his Father’s steadfast love.

While Jesus’ response to their request for more faith” was not what they wanted, not what they expected, he did said to them, *“If you have faith”* (Greek implies that they **do**) so, perhaps we should hear Jesus say, *“Since you already trust me...”* Apparently, they do not need more **faith**, they just need to **trust** the truth they already know - faith is in them, as surely as Jesus is who he says he is.

The next few lines in our reading need some attention – they have always been problematic. This teaching uses slaves and their role as illustration. Seems as if Jesus is saying to them, *“Guys... Are you really going to thank a slave for doing exactly what he was supposed to do? (Not a commentary on being a good master or a nice person – not an opinion on the practice of slavery.)* Masters/slaves were relevant in his time, but we hear the lingering effects of slavery on us. Some translations use servant/master, but Jesus wants his followers to exchange the roles they’ve envisioned for themselves (the masters,) for the roles to which they have been called (slaves, servants, disciples.) Our place is doing what Jesus has called us to do. Hear again the final lines from The Message, *“When you’ve done everything expected of you, be matter-of-fact and say, “the work is done. What we were told to*

do, we did.” Now imagine that the slave owner is likened to God, whose gratitude none of us should expect.”

New Testament scholar Karoline Lewis suggests the disciples’ *increase our faith* “comes from fretting and not trusting God ...but is (an) appeal born out of anxiety, giving witness to our uncertainty.”

Increased faith is not about being able to quote more Bible passages or pray in public at the drop of a hat or even “preach” to friends and neighbors. Increased faith (not surprisingly) comes first FROM GOD. Because we trust more when we experience God being trustworthy. Where does God show up for you? When do you feel the presence of the Spirit? How do you know God loves you? When was the last time you realized that Jesus had answered your prayer? Each of these moments add to you meeting God in person, and each of these moments teach you daily to trust *more*.

We have faith, and we don’t *need* any more. We believe, and we trust in God, just like our coins say, “In God We Trust.” Our faith is already in us and it is sufficient – like a pinch of yeast leavens the entire amount of dough – or like you can’t be a little bit pregnant. You trust in God because you have learned (as it says in Hebrews 11:1), “*Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things u not seen. Or “Faith is **trusting** in things hoped for, **trusting** in things unseen.” Amen.*

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Resources: “Practice Faith” 10/2/16 – “Duty” Joshua Serraro for ELCA Faith Lens; Fortress Commentary on the Bible.