

Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost – Year C

Luke 17: 5-10

In our first reading, we heard about a nation overrun by its enemies. It speaks of national desolation and its impact on the faithful. They challenge some of our beliefs in a God who is exclusively on our side.

Psalm 137 falls into the category of lament, a Psalm of disorientation. Can we worship in a strange land? This is the question congregations are asking in a post-COVID world. We live in a strange land - can we sing praises when the foundations of our social order have collapsed? This is an important question: when everything is turned upside down and our previous experiences of God are found wanting, what shall we do now? We live in a strange land – of children separated from their parents, churches divided to expel believers, and the list goes on. We live in a strange land. While laments the Psalmist brings everything to God in prayer and proclaims his love of God. We can only hope that the Psalmist was cured of his violence while praying.

Have you moved mountains or mulberry trees recently? Today's gospel reading challenges us and questions our faith. The disciples in Luke's gospel cry for help comes after warning about causing little ones to sin. The disciples ask Jesus, "*increase our faith.*" How often most of us could make that prayer our own? Can anyone increase or reduce their faith? Have you ever wished for more faith, or asked for more faith yourself? How do you think anybody, even Jesus, could give you more faith?

Faith is a response to love; since God is love, there can be no limits to faith, except the one we set. Faith is not in the head like some mental assessment. It should come from our hearts. For example, we know that Jesus is Lord. That is just the knowledge and even Satan knows that. Faith has to do with our response to God's love and to the promises Jesus has made.

Luke suggests that faithfulness and loyalty to Christ's way are not optional but mandated for believers. Increasing faith emerges in the everyday events of life. Belief finds its fulfilment in our responses to ordinary events.

Our faith can grow. Jesus compares faith to a tiny grain of mustard seed. I believe at least some of you use mustard seed at home. At our home, we use the mustard seed in all the dishes. It is extraordinary how Jesus is very definite about faith; I mean faith that moves mountains and mulberry trees. As said earlier faith is a response to love and a direct outcome of humility. We are certain that only God can do God things.

We need to be careful with whom we place our trust. Seek out the impossible in life. Ask ourselves if we are ready to hand them over to Jesus. Faith means handing them over and keeping our hands off them. These are the questions to be asked and to be answered. Do we believe that God can do for us that we cannot do for ourselves? Do we believe that God wants to do this for us?

In the Gospel Jesus continues and reminds us that we are servants who are only doing what we ought to do, healing, forgiving, removing obstacles, loving, thanking, and above all serving. We are called to be not a hindrance to the discipleship of others, forgive all who ask forgiveness, and when we did all these things do not assume that we have done more than our duty. Faithfulness, forgiveness, and humility are required of those who would be obedient to Jesus.

Faith in God doesn't prescribe the future for us or guarantee what we think we might want from that future. It frees us from fear of that future. Faith in God doesn't mean that we will be magically freed from anxieties, disappointments, illnesses, failures, and misunderstandings. They are part and parcel of life. But it does mean that we are freed from the fear that these things could ever destroy the ultimate value and meaning of our lives.

Like Timothy, our faith must be kindled and become fiery, and it also must be based on good theology or sound teaching. Our faith is grounded in the faith of others, and the graceful interdependence of life. We must now claim our faith – the faith like a mustard seed that can transform individuals and the community around us.