

Sermon for Sunday, October 2, 2022
Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost
“All That We Need”
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Beloved people of God, grace to you and peace in the name of Jesus.

I have a lot of compassion for the disciples in our Gospel reading today. They've been asked to do incredibly hard things and they're intimidated. Jesus wants them to hold others accountable and then forgive when others repent, even if the same person sins against them seven times in one day. That's a lot. That's hard. They say to Jesus: We need help, make it better, increase our faith.

I'm guessing many of us feel kind of like the disciples right now. The world is a lot. Things are hard. We could use some help here Jesus. Maybe if we could just have a little more faith, that would help us to keep on keeping on. *Then* we could work together with people who think differently, we could be more hopeful, we could forgive, we could work for change. So Jesus, help us out. Increase our faith. Seems reasonable, right? Jesus doesn't seem to think so. I don't like the way he responds to this request. He's direct and harsh and not at all warm and fuzzy. Yet I have a sneaking suspicion that Jesus' response is exactly what we need today.

Before we ponder his response, I do have to say that Jesus' metaphor of the master and his slave doesn't work for us today. No one should be called a worthless slave. I hope you never think of yourself that way. Jesus used all sorts of common images from his daily life in an unjust economic system. We heard another one of them a few weeks ago in the parable of the dishonest manager. Jesus used these images not to endorse injustice but to make his teachings concrete.

To be able to take in Jesus' wisdom today, it's more helpful to picture scenes from our daily lives - our jobs, homes, schools, families. So, imagine this. You're struggling with something at work or in class, you tell the boss or teacher and he says, "You're right, that's so hard, let me just make it better. You tell me how to help you and I'll do it, whatever you ask of me." That might feel good at first, but would you learn and grow? Would you gain confidence in your gifts?

When the disciples are struggling with what he's asking of them, Jesus offers a different type of encouragement. The ways he encourages reminds me of the best boss I've ever had, Dave Jarvis. Dave's been Executive Director at Rainbow Trail Lutheran Camp in Colorado for thirty-one years. I worked for him for three summers, two as a camp counselor and one as the summer program director. Dave has incredible vision for how to develop faith as well as leadership and community building skills in campers. At many camps, the counselors organize and lead the worship services, daily activities, and evening events. This often results in wonderful, counselor-led programming. But at Rainbow Trail, the kids work together to plan out the daily schedule and take turns leading worship and all camp activities. The counselors work behind the scenes to help the kids communicate and compromise, schedule and organize, plan and prepare to lead. This is a ton of work! It's a lot easier for counselors to lead everything. This model also means counselors get just 24 hours off between each session with campers. At most other camps, they get closer to 48 hours off. Besides all this, there are literal mountains to climb with kids, it being Colorado and all.

Working at Rainbow Trail is a lot. It's amazing and life-changing, but it is also intimidating and overwhelming. When I was program director it was early in Dave's tenure at the camp. I sometimes told him, "I think this is too much for the staff." That never went over well. Dave didn't respond by saying, "Oh no, maybe we should do something to make it easier. Maybe we should ask them what they think would be best." No. Dave would look at me with his intense eyes and his jaw set firmly. "They've got it," he'd say. "You've got it. Get back to work." Dave knew his role was to have the vision and lead his team. It would not have been good if that vision had changed based on the feelings and demands of the staff. He kept his eye on the big picture. He helped the staff to know we could do the work. He didn't do this by being warm and fuzzy, but by giving us tools and trusting us to use them.

Jesus responds in a similar way when his first disciples and when we feel like things are too hard, when we think we need more faith. He says, "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." He's using some hyperbole here. I picture Dave Jarvis saying to me, if you had faith the size of this water bottle, you could tell it to fly to the top of the mountain on Hike Day and it would obey you.

There's also something lost in translation with Jesus' words here. What he says is more like: "if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, *and you know you do*, you can work wonders." You have enough faith, Jesus says to us. You have all that you need for these difficult days. This is true for each of us, for you. God has created you good. God has given you so many gifts:

Jesus has claimed you as his own and made you part of his church;

Jesus creates faith in you, through the power of the Holy Spirit;

Jesus sends you to carry out his vision.

This is a vision for the healing of the world. It is a life-changing and demanding vision. It asks a lot of us. Jesus asks a lot of us. Jesus asks us to love people who make our blood boil, to explain our neighbor's actions in the kindest way possible, to show up for community when we are tired, hold others accountable, forgive, put our gifts to use in service to others. This can all be a bit intimidating. It's OK if we feel daunted, unqualified, ill prepared. Jesus won't be deterred by our feelings and demands. He can't be stopped from carrying out the vision. He'll keep calling us to join him, to use what we've been given and follow where he leads

As we do, we find we truly have everything we need.

As we do, we experience the healing Jesus is bringing to everyone.

We can trust and follow him.