

Luke 17:1-10

October 14, 2007 – 20th SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

“Increase Our Faith!”

✠ **In repentant forgiveness (vv.1-4)**

✠ **In humble service (vv.5-10)**

In the name of Jesus, our merciful and gracious Lord and Master, dear fellow servants:

You know the feeling as you hurry through heavy traffic to something important. “I don’t want to be late again!” you sigh as you finally see an opening and press the pedal. Then you see why everyone slowed down. The State Patrolman has his speed gun aimed right at you. Now your taillights are as red as the blood vessels in your neck as you creep past and check your rearview mirror. Then your heart starts pounding out of your chest. “You’ve got to be kidding!” as he pulls you over and walks up to your car. You roll down the window to see a smiling face and hear the words, “Do you realize what a great job you did of slowing down back there? Follow me! We’ll get you through this – “Pronto Patrol!” Don’t hold your breath. That may be the way Americans think of God, but it only proves how much we need a better education from the Master Teacher. How’s your faith today? Maybe a little careless?

✠ **In repentant forgiveness (vv.1-4)**

Jesus wants us to realize something far worse than running a stop sign or getting a ticket. Jesus still says *to his disciples*: “**Things that cause people to sin are bound to come, but woe to that person through whom they come.**” What are “offenses that cause people to sin”? Anyone ever see you doing what makes him think sin is okay? Your neighbor knows you’re a church member but sees you skipping church and never talking about your faith. Why should he care to find out about God? You swear; he swears and thinks, “At least I’m not a hypocrite!” One young man was living with his girlfriend because his older sister did, and his parents did nothing. He failed to mention how his pastor came over and admonished the whole family for this sin of fornication. But the family seemed to miss the fact that what Jesus says here applies to everyone who misleads others into sin: “**It would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around his neck than for him to cause one of these little ones to sin.**” For “*little ones*” like children or a neighbor “little” in his faith, offensive death traps are unavoidable. But Jesus says, “Hold this in front of your face lest you drown in God’s judgment.”

That makes me feel like the patrolman on heaven’s highway has his radar gun aimed right at me. I can’t keep my wheels between the lines when I’m frustrated or just not concentrating. And Jesus knows. In fact, that’s why He came to pay the penalty for every transgression, for every time we crossed the line of God’s perfection and ran right into the ditch of sin. But don’t get groggy because Jesus expects His boundless love and kindness to shine through our faith-life **In Repentant forgiveness.**

Jesus says: “**If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, ‘I repent,’ forgive him.**” Can you remember that well? Has anyone ever done the same thing to you seven times in a day and said, “I’m sorry,” seven times? How many times a day do we forget to even think about God and our neighbor’s needs, much less help and worship? How often must we say, “I’m sorry”? God’s non-stop forgiveness of all my sins calls for **Repentant forgiveness** from me, especially when hurt runs deep. Can you see why the Lord’s apostles asked for such a miracle? We pray with them, “Lord, **Increase Our Faith!**”

✠ **In humble service (vv.5-10)**

It was a dumb example for a State Patrolman to congratulate you for slowing down. Taxes would skyrocket if they paid \$100 to stop sign stoppers. Real criminals would be out there breaking the law while cops kept busy rewarding what we’re supposed to do. But that’s how people think God should treat

us. You can hear it in the question everyone asks when trouble strikes: “Why me, Lord? What did I do?” We naturally think God should ignore our wrongs and reward us for doing good. Unless Jesus corrects us, we assume we deserve God’s grace. “Lord, **Increase Our Faith!**” **In humble service.**

Since none of us have servants, let’s take Jesus’ example to the restaurant. Tired and hungry, you finally find a seat, and then a sweaty waiter comes over. He’s had a rough day too. Now is the customer expected to get up and serve the waiter? “Here’s a cool cloth to refresh yourself, my man! Sit back and let me get you a tall cold one. Your steak is on the barbie right behind your salad and breadsticks.”

That would not make sense in Jesus’ day either. Waiters are meant to serve you until you’re satisfied and ready to pay. But that’s where our culture veers into the ditch because God does not owe us a tip. We’re not waiters, but slaves of the Almighty who created us to love and serve Him with perfect, non-stop, heartfelt love and devotion. When we’re tired and weary, He still has every right to expect our best in love for God and our neighbor. And even if we could do everything we were commanded by God, each of us would have to confess, “***We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.***” Truth be told, Jesus says in another place that “***unworthy servants***” still deserve a reservation in that heartbreak hotel where there will be “***weeping and gnashing of teeth.***” (Matthew 25:30) Failing to love God with all our heart, soul and mind, makes “***filthy rags***” of our best efforts. (Isaiah 64:6)

“Increase Our Faith! Let your mercy wash away our sinful pride. Wrap us up in righteousness as holy and pleasing as you.” Look at Jesus. Our kind, gentle Savior started answering this prayer right away: “***If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and it will obey you.***” Faith’s size does not determine its power. Faith rests on Christ alone and is most powerful in childlike trust in God’s loving kindness and tender mercy.

Rosa Young was a great example long before Rosa Parks became famous in the civil rights movement. Born in 1890, Rosa Young grew up in the African-Methodist Church. In spite of poor health she became high school valedictorian and went to college to follow her dream of becoming a teacher. She opened her own school in Rosebud, Alabama, October 1912, and enjoyed success in two years with two assistants and peak enrollment of 215. We northerners can’t imagine how the boll weevil blight destroyed local economies and everyone’s ability to pay tuition. Desperate for help, Rosa Young wrote the famous educator Booker T. Washington, who suggested she contact the Board of Colored Missions of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod in St. Louis. Their help with religious training gave Rosa Young the great increase of faith she needed. Bible history, Luther’s Catechism, Lutheran hymns – she says, “This is where I first learned to know what my Savior meant to me and where I became a Lutheran. I was no longer in darkness.” Call it God’s “boll weevil blessing” on mustard-seed faith. All over Alabama twenty-nine Lutheran congregations and thirty schools sprang up in a couple years. Rosa wrote in her autobiography, *Light in the Dark Belt*, about Gospel miracles: “In homes where parents and children once lived in hellish riot, where hatred, anger, violence, sin, adultery, fornication, and theft prevailed, there has been a great change through the power of God, and they have become Christian homes.”¹

God surely does not owe us faith or its fruitful blessings. But He loves to produce them in His garden of grace. For even the tiniest faith that keeps growing until His return Jesus says: “***It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. I tell you the truth, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them.***” (Luke 12:37 NIV) Serving such a Master, who needs hundred dollar bills at stop signs? Thanks to Jesus, we’re bound for glory with God. He who gives rewards of grace through His Word and Sacraments will quietly and powerfully “**Increase Our Faith!**” – **In repentant forgiveness** and **In humble service.** “Glory be to Jesus!” Amen.

¹ Theodore J. Hartwig, “Rosa Young: Lutheran Missionary – An African-American Lutheran made a difference by teaching in Alabama.” *Forward in Christ*, September 2007, p. 29. Available from NPH at 1-800-662-6022.
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