

2 TIMOTHY 1:1-14 (p. 963)

OCTOBER 2, 2022

LUKE 17:5-10 (p. 850)

BLAINE

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

Help us to Keep the Faith Lord. Help us to guard the good deposit that has so lovingly been placed within our hearts by your Holy Spirit. And help us to see, to acknowledge, and then to freely share, the Truth that we discover here in your Word. In Jesus' Name we ask this, Amen.

"THE MARKS OF FAITH"

Imagine, if you will, that someone automatically deposits \$86,400 into your Bank Account every day. It happens at precisely 12:01 AM, one minute after midnight, just like clockwork. You've won some-kind of weird Sweepstakes, or a rather bizarre Lottery. Or maybe an eccentric Aunt has left you an inheritance, one with a humorous twist. In any case, this is a totally free-gift. A windfall really. Only at midnight the very next night, your entire Bank Account reverts to zero! No matter what the balance is at the time, it all goes away. It's basically, "Use It, or Lose It". Oh! And I forgot! You don't know how long this arrangement will last! So, what would you do with your allotted daily gift?

You would probably draw out every single cent, right, every single day? You might pay bills with some of it, you know, be responsible? You might play with some of it, have a little fun? You might take a well-deserved vacation? Who knows! Heck, you might even give some to the Church, giving in the way you have always thought you should!

But you wouldn't waste it, would you? Not a cent. You would not sit ideally by and watch it disappear at the end of the day. There is no way! It is too valuable for that! This is a gift, a precious gift! And those deposits will not last forever!

So, do you realize that each one of us is given a daily "gift of time"? Every day we get 86,400 seconds deposited into our account. None of us gets a single second more. And none of us gets a single second less. We are all given the same exact amount of time to spend any way we choose! However, what we don't use, or don't use wisely, is lost to us forever! There is no "Balance of Time" that we can carry forward to the next day. There are no "Rollover Minutes." Overdrafts are strictly forbidden. And you can't go back to a previous balance either, or borrow against tomorrow. All you can do, with this absolutely free-gift, is spend today's allotment. And the clock is ticking. You have no idea when the arrangement will end. So, what should you do?

In verse one of our reading, Jesus is talking to His Disciples, to those who have chosen to follow Him. That's what the word "Disciple" means, "One who Follows". And in verse five, He is talking to the "Apostles," to "Those who are Sent." They are the ones who ask the Lord to "Increase their Faith"! Now I'm not sure if this is two-separate-groups, or one in the same. I don't know if one group is a subset of the other. But I don't think it really matters, do you? Both groups obviously have Faith, right? And that's the point of today's lesson! Which makes their request seem a little odd, doesn't it? But then, so is Jesus' answer. "If you have Faith as small as a mustard seed you can say to that Mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it will obey you"! So, I guess I'm confused.

And Jesus makes it worse. He goes on to say, “Suppose one of you has a servant who has been working out in the field all day. In the evening, when he comes in, would you say, ‘here, grab a seat at my table, come and share my meal’? No! You’d say, ‘Go and clean up, then make my supper and wait on me! And then, when I’m done, you can go and get yourself something to eat’. And you wouldn’t thank that Servant for simply doing what he was told to do, would you? You wouldn’t reward him, or give him a gold sticker! Well, the same goes for you!”

Again, I’m confused. Those who have Faith, ask for Faith. And Jesus says, if you have just a little, it will be enough. He then says if you cause someone to sin, things will turn out very badly for you. But if someone sins against you, you need to forgive them. Many times! As often as they ask, in fact! And finally, as one of My Servants, don’t expect to get patted on the back. Just do what is asked of you, without any thought of a reward. Are you with me? Are you too a bit confused? Maybe we need to unpack it a bit.

In the Chapters prior to our Gospel lesson, Luke has pointed out how hard Jesus is pushing His Disciples! Ever since Chapter 9, in fact, when Jesus, “set His face towards Jerusalem and the Cross”, He has been tough, unrelenting even! He commissioned 70 Disciples to go out and Teach and Preach. He verbally jousting with a Lawyer who wanted to know who his neighbor really is! He taught His followers to pray. He has some exceptionally difficult words for the Scribes and Pharisees, for the Rich, and for those who hold power! And He tells His Disciples to not be anxious about anything! To not worry about anything! Which I don’t think really helped at the time, do you?

He shared two Parables that both begin with the phrase, “There was a rich man...” He pointed out that “no one can serve two Masters.” It’s either God, or worldly possessions! He then adds that there is a Chasm, an Eternal Barrier set between those who figure that out, and those who don’t!

And then, Jesus turns to the Disciples, leans in real close, I imagine, and says, “Things are going to get tough, so don’t screw up! And don’t cause anyone else to screw up either! It would be far better for a great big millstone to be tied around your neck—and both it, and you, dropped into the sea—than it would for you to cause someone else to stumble! However, if someone sins against you, no matter what they do, or how often they do it, if they repent, then you must turn back to them and forgive them!”

Jesus is asking a lot, isn’t He? He is talking about Discipleship, Radical Discipleship, what it takes to be one of His Followers! He is drawing closer to Jerusalem, to His ultimate purpose, and He needs us to understand our Job Description, to know the requirements for being a Christian! You simply must not cause another Believer to sin! And woe to you if you do! He calls the members of this Body “little ones”! We are clearly precious in the eyes of God! And should be to each other as well!

Sin needs to be rebuked, make no mistake! This is a Community of Righteousness! But if someone repents, they must be forgiven! Faith is a Family thing, not an individual pursuit! Therefore, restoration is always the goal! And as a member of this Body, don’t look to be commended for simply doing your duty. Everyone in the Family has chores.

No wonder they ask for more Faith, right? They need it! We all do! They must have been exhausted, maybe overwhelmed, don't you think? Just read through this section of Luke's Gospel! This Discipleship thing is really demanding! Maybe downright painful at times! And you are not in it for the kudos or rewards!

Aren't the Disciples just asking for a little help here? "Hey Jesus, increase our Faith, please, so that we can do all this better. You're talking about being on guard, and about forgiveness. You've set the bar really high. We just want to follow you in all this. We want to respond in dramatic and amazing ways! We want to be brilliant, Lord! So please, increase our Faith!"

I mean, how often have you done that, asked Jesus to increase your Faith? Or how often have you gone to a sister or brother, or an Elder, or a Pastor, trying to discover the "Secret Formula" for turning yourself into a Super Christian? "I get that this is going to be hard Lord! And I know myself fairly-well! Obedience does not come easy for me, let alone Forgiveness! So please, make me a better Believer. Increase my Faith!" To which Jesus answers, "If you have Faith as small as a mustard seed, you would be shocked at what you can do!" "I know Lord! I get that! Which is why I'm asking for more!"

I can relate to the Disciples. I remember lots of prayers asking Jesus for wisdom and strength, for power and perseverance, for, in essence, more Faith! I do want to do great things for God! I want to be on fire! Don't you? I want to be so awesome in this world, that I will receive a Jewel-Covered Crown in the next! Lord, increase my Faith!

Jesus' response to our request seems really sharp! But maybe it's not as sharp as it first appears? We tend to read it, "If only you had a tiny bit of Faith, even as small as a mustard seed." So, we try to work-up that kind of Faith. We try to build-up an "emotional high," a mountain top experience, an Epiphany, in Worship for instance, or somewhere out in the world! And when we can't, or don't, for whatever reason—or it doesn't happen often enough, or easily enough—we tend to think we have failed, right? "Increase my Faith Lord, because I obviously stink at it so far!

But when you consider the subtle linguistic nuances here, or when you read the Commentators who actually understand them, what Jesus is actually saying here is more like, "If you have Faith even as small as a mustard seed, **WHICH YOU ALREADY DO**, you can tell that Mulberry tree over there to go jump in the lake and grow, and it will!" You are already there, folks! You don't need more Faith! You already have more than enough to do the job I am calling you to do! And you have had, since the very beginning"! And that makes me wonder why we Apostles, always think we need more! Do you think it's because we don't understand what we're asking for?

The word Faith, in Scripture, is sometimes used as a Noun. But more often really, the word is used as a Verb, a powerful action word! In Galatians, for example, Paul writes that, "The only thing that counts is faith, expressing itself through love". In First Thessalonians Paul says, "our work is produced by faith, our labor is prompted by love, and our endurance is inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ."

In 2 Thessalonians he says, “We constantly pray for you, that God may count you worthy of His calling, and that by His power He may fulfill every good purpose of yours, and every ACT, prompted by your Faith”! Faith is an action word!

Just scan through Hebrews 11. “By Faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did.” “By Faith Noah built an Ark.” “By Faith, Abraham obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going.” “By Faith he made his home in the Promised Land” “By Faith he became the father of Isaac.” “By Faith, he offered up Isaac as a Sacrifice”! “By Faith, Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau” “By Faith, Jacob, blessed Joseph’s sons”

“By Faith, Moses’ parents hid him for three months” “By Faith Moses refused to be known as the Pharaoh’s daughter’s son” “By faith Moses left Egypt, kept the Passover, and crossed through the parted waters of the Red Sea”! “By Faith, the people marched around the walls of Jericho”! “By Faith, Rahab hid away the spies” “What good is it,” says James, “if a man claims to have Faith but has no deeds!” And then later, “Faith, without action, is dead!” It’s a different perspective on Faith, isn’t it? One that makes what Jesus is saying here much easier to understand!

“Increase our Faith,” ask the Apostles. And Jesus answers, “You’ve got enough”! “Faith as small as a mustard seed, is more than enough”! “And even that has already been given to you, as a Gift from your Father in Heaven!” “You are asking the wrong thing here guys!

You don't need to increase your Faith. Noun. What you need to do is to increase your Faithfulness! Verb. Let me say it again. You don't need to increase your Faith! You need to increase your Faithfulness! And believe me, there is a huge difference!"

"What you need to do is go and act on the Faith you already have! Do what I have told you to do! Obey me! It's that simple! And by-the-way, at the end of the day, after you have served Me like I've asked you to do, don't go expecting a reward! Got it!" In other words, Faith is a gift from God. who gives it to us in the exact amount that we need to do what He asks us to do! It never runs out! And it's never, not enough!

Faithfulness, on the other hand, is our "response" to the Faith that we have been given. It is what we do with our Faith. And that's completely up to us, all 86,400 seconds worth! Faithfulness is defined as being loyal and obedient to the person we put our trust in. Therefore, faith in Jesus requires that we be Faithful to Him! When we accept Jesus as our Savior, we put our Faith in Him. But when we accept Jesus as our Lord, we put our Faithfulness in Him! See the difference? Lord, increase our Faithfulness!

Make no mistake, Jesus wants both! It's not enough though to say, "Thanks Jesus for dying on the Cross for me. I accept you as my Savior. See you later". We have to also say, Jesus, I accept you as my Lord and King, as the Ruler of my life! When we accept Salvation through Jesus, we die to ourselves at that very moment! It is symbolized in our Baptism! Where we are then Resurrected as new creations, and no longer live for ourselves!

We live for Jesus from that moment on! We must give our entire lives, every second, every part, over to God! Sure, things might get tough! In fact, they probably will! They did for Jesus, and that's who we are following, right! So, we have to sincerely say, "Lord, here I am! Use me as you wish, no matter what!"

I remember back in the day, in an Undergraduate Class, learning about Alexander the Great. He was a brave and brilliant General, one well-respected by all of his soldiers. Maybe you knew that? One time, one of his officers was accused of insubordination and behavior bordering on cowardice. So, Alexander the Great had the officer brought before him, and asked him, "What is your name?" The officer, a bit sheepish, nervously replied, "Sir, my name is the same as yours. My name is Alexander." The General paused for a moment, stared at the officer, and then said, "Alexander! Then you either need to change your name, or change your behavior!"

That's what Jesus is calling us to do! We cannot hope to be called Disciples, those who follow the Lord—let alone Apostles, those who are sent out in His Name—unless we are willing to be like Him! To say what He said, and do what He did! So, we either need to change our name, or change our behavior! It is really that simple! And remember, every second counts! So, all of God's people said, Amen!

PASTORAL PRAYER

Thank you, Lord, for making us who we are, for bringing us together into this Community of Faith, and for giving us all the gifts necessary to further your cause. Help us Lord to use these wisely. Help us to get along with each other, and with those out in the world. Make us into examples that others want to follow, and therefore find their way to you. Pour out upon us your ability to forgive. Cause us to be different, so that others will see us and say, “My, how they love one another”! Equip us Lord, to serve each other, and to serve your world, in your Son’s Name!

Father, all of our Blessings come from you. Through your Grace, we are able to be gracious to others. Through your Gifts, we are able to give to those in need. And through your Love and Forgiveness, we, in turn, are able to love and forgive. Help us now to do these very things, with all who we meet, especially with our sisters and brothers in Christ.

You know our pain Lord. You know the places where we hurt, even those secret places. You are aware of all the sources of our fear, and all that we need to make us whole. You know what help we need, the places where wisdom and understanding should abound, or where patience and faith are required. And you know our loved ones who need your healing touch this very day. As such Lord, we pray for.....

Each of these concerns Father, each worry, and each joy, we lay down now before you. And as we do, as we place them into your Overwhelming Love, unburden us please. Relieve our worries and apprehensions, as we step out in Faith. Open up our hearts, and then open up our hands. Use us, and our lives, and this church to Glorify you, with all that we say and do! We ask these things in Jesus’ Name, where each moment of our lives comes from. And we pray now, in the way that He taught us saying, Our Father...