

Sermon for LWML Sunday

Date: October 6, 2019

Location: St. John's Lutheran Church, Austin, MN

Old Testament: Habakkuk 1:1–4; 2:1–4

Epistle Reading: 2 Timothy 1:1–14

Gospel Reading: Luke 17:1–10

Sermon Text: Luke 17:1–10

Sermon Title: The Mulberry Tree

Psalm: Psalm 62

Hymns:

With Joy We Come Together (*Tune: LSB 527*)

Kyrie (*Tune: LW 231*)

Hymn of Praise (*Tune: LSB 803*)

Alleluia Verse (*Tune: LSB 605 – Refrain*)

Gospel Response/Sermon Song P&W #132 Step by Step

Creedal Payer (Tune: LW 252 (RESIGNATION))

Sanctus (*Tune: LSB 443*)

Lamb of God (*Tune: LSB 886*)

Thanksgiving (*Tune: LSB 789 (BUSESSAN)*)

Serve the Lord with Gladness (*Tune: LSB 662*)

Distribution:

LSB 838 – Eat This Bread

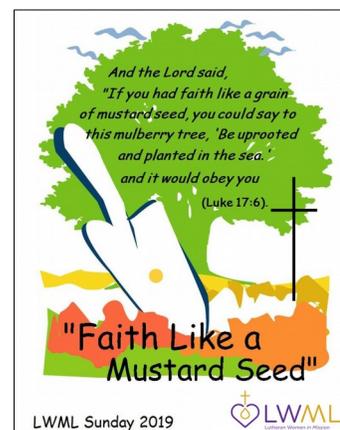
LSB 620 – Jesus Comes Today with Healing

Liturgy:

Divine Service: Special



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Text: Luke 17:1–10

[Jesus] said to his disciples, “Temptations to sin are sure to come, but woe to the one through whom they come! It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were cast into the sea than that he should cause one of these little ones to sin. Pay attention to yourselves! If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him, and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, saying, ‘I repent,’ you must forgive him.”

The apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our faith!” The Lord said, “If you had faith like a grain of mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and it would obey you.

“Will any one of you who has a servant plowing or keeping sheep say to him when he has come in from the field, ‘Come at once and recline at table’? Will he not rather say to him, ‘Prepare supper for me, and dress properly, and serve me while I eat and drink, and afterward you will eat and drink’? Does he thank the servant because he did what was commanded? So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.’”

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Pronunciation for difficult words are contained in { }

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Grace, peace and mercy be yours in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Sometimes it may feel difficult to be a Christian. The world has for us changed a lot from when we grew up. More and more people are walking out of churches and never coming back. People see the Church as irrelevant, judgmental and hypocritical. There is a lot of talk about the challenges of living in a post-Christian world. That kind of talk can lead to feeling timid, fearful even thoughts filled with doubt. We may think, “what is our world coming to?”

Truthfully, our world is not that all that different from the world at the time Jesus walked this earth. Their world has been described as a pre-Christian world in which people did not know Jesus, His teachings or His mission. Just like today many people many know His name, but so many people don’t know Him like they should.

That phrase “pre-Christian,” that actually might be a better description for our time. It is better than “post-Christian” Because “pre-Christian” says that Christians are not participants in a dying institution but a moving and living Church. It says that people are watching us and wondering what makes us tick. To call our world “pre-Christian” is to say we still have an impact on it by the way we live. It says that our stories and songs matter, and that our everyday life impacts the way the world sees Jesus.

That is exactly what was happening with Jesus and His disciples in the Gospel reading. Jesus was constantly teaching about everyday stuff; everyday values and practices. Here He tells His disciples that they would need to forgive others, even if they had been wronged seven times in a single day. He wasn’t talking about submissive obedience to the Law. He was talking about a way of life. He was referring to the simple but challenging act of confronting another believer with their sin and then with repentance shown forgiveness is given.

This is the stuff of everyday relationships. It is hard to confront people with their sins. Especially when it is people you know should and do know better. It is hard to forgive those who have wronged you. Especially when it is people you’ve called friend that have betrayed you. The roots of bitterness can run deep, and last long, like tree roots. Like mulberry tree roots that are stubborn and strong. It’s no wonder the disciples asked Jesus to, “Increase our faith.¹”

for Jesus it was one of those teaching moments. So when His disciples said, “Increase our faith!” Jesus did not say, “Sure, abracadabra alakazam! You have greater faith!” What He did say was, “If you had faith like a mustard seed you

1 Luke 17:5

could say to this mulberry tree, “Pull yourself up by the roots, and plant yourself in the sea!” and it would obey you.

Jesus doesn’t explain His words here. So imaginations can run. You have to admit, it’s quite an image. With just a little faith, Jesus is saying, with faith as small as a mustard seed, the faith you have right now can uproot a thirty-foot mulberry tree and plant it at the bottom of the ocean. Imagine a Christian saying to a mulberry tree, “Pull up your roots and head for the ocean! You will be the first mulberry tree successfully transplanted to the ocean floor!” Then we see, of all things, this mulberry tree flying off to its new location, some 4,000 feet below sea level! That’s probably not really what Jesus was asking us to do. So what is Jesus saying here?

For one thing He is saying that it is not helpful to measure your faith. Jesus’ disciples were doing that with their request, “Increase our faith!” In other words, give us more faith, heroic faith, enough faith to do the hard thing in hard times.” Jesus’ answer shows this it is not helpful to make faith a measurable possession. Yet we do it all the time. We say, “If only I had enough faith!” “If I could just believe enough!” or maybe “I guess I just don’t have enough faith!” Can we believe enough? Can we trust enough? Do we have enough faith to make things happen?

If faith is not to something to be measured how do we understand Jesus’ words, “faith like a mustard seed”? How can faith send mulberry trees flying into the sea? Jesus’ concept of faith puts the whole matter of faith into our relationship with Him. “Faith like mustard seed” is simply trust in Him, a trust that holds onto Him, depends on Him, and lives every day in Him. It is only in Christ that we move mulberry trees, even the deep ones like bitterness and a lack of forgiveness.

In Latin there are two words for faith. The first is *fides*, which can be seen as measurable faith. It is faith that believes certain things are true. *Fides* says, “I believe that... that God created the world... that Jesus was born of a virgin... that Jesus was crucified and raised from the dead...” Our creeds are examples of *fides*.

The other word for faith in Latin is *fiducia*. This is relational faith. It is trust in Jesus, being rooted in the power of God. *Fiducia* was Martin Luther’s word of choice for faith. You can hear *fiducia* at work in what PaulI teaches, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”²

So “faith like mustard seed” says that I can forgive, not so much because I have enough faith to do it, but rather because I live and make decisions inside a strong

relationship with Jesus. “Faith like a mustard seed” says I already have what I need to live like a Christian. It is to say I have Jesus, or far better, Jesus has me!

The One who came and died for me, the One who defeated death and came back to life for me, the One who called me in Holy Baptism and made me His own, He is the One who makes the impossible things possible. So, in Christ, I confront the person who has wronged me, and I offer forgiveness when repentance is shown. I do the hard things and share my faith with my neighbor.

It also means I make time to pack food for the hungry, I drop a quarter in an LWML mite box, I hold the hand of a neighbor in the hospital even if he’s not my favorite neighbor. In Jesus, our church takes on a new ministry, knowing that it will be hard, something new, uncharted territory. We can do that simply because it is what Jesus would have us do. So we see our community not as the enemy, or the problem, but as the mission field. Underneath it all, you hear mulberry trees moving. You see hard things, the seemingly impossible things, happening because Jesus lives within us.

The Lutheran Women’s Missionary League has always lived by mustard seed faith. Little gifts, mites, combined across our synod, make big things happen in mission across the world. Jesus has been moving mulberry trees through the LWML since 1942. They are a wonderful example for Christian discipleship! If our congregations are the soul of the LCMS; if our pastors, workers, and missionaries are the beautiful feet of the LCMS; if our seminaries and universities are the mind of the LCMS; if Lutheran Hour Ministry is the voice of the LCMS; then the LWML is the heart of the LCMS. The women of our church, with their Christian grace, and beautiful Christian hearts, have taught us what it means to move mulberry trees with just a little faith. In our relationship with Jesus, we have what is necessary to do difficult, even seemingly impossible, things. Why should that be so hard to believe? He has moved us from death to life, from being orphans to being His children, from guilt to clean, from conflict to reconciliation.

There is a painting by Vincent van Gogh is titled “The Mulberry Tree.” He painted it in 1889 while in voluntary confinement at a mental asylum. The mulberry tree in the picture is impressive. It is strong, gnarly, filed with leaves, and, in his painting, rich in color with tones of yellow and gold. It is formidable, rooted in rock and set against a deep blue sky. For van Gogh, an ordinary tree took on the character of beauty, strength, and even joy. Yellow was his color for joy.

That should be our attitude the next time we think that it is difficult to follow Jesus. What appears to be hard, or even impossible, may be just the thing we need to do as we live with Jesus day in and day out. Because Jesus lives within us, the

difficult thing can be done with joy. It may not always be easy but it is possible in Jesus. Wouldn't it be wonderful if the people of Austin said of us, "Those are the Christians who move mulberry trees!"

That too can be true, in Jesus' name.

Amen.

