

**Sermon for Morning Prayer
The Fourteenth Sunday After Trinity**

The First Lesson: 1 Chronicles 29:10-17

10 Wherefore David blessed the LORD before all the congregation: and David said, Blessed be thou, LORD God of Israel our father, for ever and ever. 11 Thine, O LORD, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O LORD, and thou art exalted as head above all. 12 Both riches and honor come of thee, and thou reignest over all; and in thine hand is power and might; and in thine hand it is to make great, and to give strength unto all. 13 Now therefore, our God, we thank thee, and praise thy glorious name. 14 But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? for all things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee. 15 For we are strangers before thee, and sojourners, as were all our fathers: our days on the earth are as a shadow, and there is none abiding. 16 O LORD our God, all this store that we have prepared to build thee an house for thine holy name cometh of thine hand, and is all thine own. 17 I know also, my God, that thou triest the heart, and hast pleasure in uprightness. As for me, in the uprightness of mine heart I have willingly offered all these things: and now have I seen with joy thy people, which are present here, to offer willingly unto thee.”

Second Lesson: St. Luke 17:5-10

5 And the apostles said unto the Lord, Increase our faith. 6 And the Lord said, If ye had faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye might say unto this sycamine tree, Be thou plucked up by the root, and be thou planted in the sea; and it should obey you. 7 But which of you, having a servant plowing or feeding cattle, will say unto him by and by, when he is come from the field, Go and sit down to meat? 8 And will not rather say unto him, Make ready wherewith I may sup, and gird thyself, and serve me, till I have eaten and drunken; and afterward thou shalt eat and drink? 9 Doth he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I trow not. 10 So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do.”

Introduction:

When we consider the concept of faith it is often nice to look at its basic definition. The Oxford dictionary defines faith as a strong belief in God or in the doctrines of a religion, based on spiritual apprehension rather than proof.

Using the scientific method to prove that God exists is often the ammunition that skeptics use to refute and deny the beliefs Christians have. If something can't be concretely proven, how can it be real? Using the scientific method is a great way to prove physics, study the cell structures of plants, or create new medicine for disease. However, it is the wrong tool to prove the existence of God. When the pandemic started, I bought myself a metal detector to get outside and get some fresh air. I quickly learned that this tool is constructed to find certain precious metals like gold or silver. It is also designed to look for certain shapes such as coins or rings. If I wanted to find old pottery or plastic items, it would not be functional. If I tried to use it to find items it was not designed to find, I would end up frustrated and perhaps confused. It is the same concept when looking at our own personal faith, you must use the right tool. Faith in God is something we believe strongly through our intuition and our experiences interacting with God. We come to know God by grace through faith.

One of the greatest examples of faith in scripture is found in the book of Job. We meet Job, and we see a man who was blameless and upright, who feared and loved God and turned away from evil. (Job 1:1) Job was blessed by the Lord for his faithfulness, his life was abundant, and he was incredibly happy. Satan, in a conversation with God, makes the comment that the only reason Job is so faithful and obedient is that he has been blessed in such a wonderful manner. Satan throws out the challenge that if all the blessing Job enjoyed disappeared, he predicts that Job will curse God and cease to worship him. God allows Satan to curse Job but not the ability to end his life. (v. 12)

As a result of Satan's interfering, Job loses everything. All his livestock is killed, his children are crushed when the house they are staying in blows over, his body is riddled with oozing sores and festering boils. His friends witnessed his great suffering and Job himself laments and questions why he is dealing with all of it. However, throughout all of it, Job stays focused on God and his faith stays strong, although he goes through a season of struggles and questions. He knows that he is being tested, he knows that his redeemer lives, he knows that God is all

powerful and through it all he continues to do his duty. His friends, who blamed his unfortunate circumstances on guilt and sin are rebuked and learn from watching Job what God is all about. In the end, Job is reinstated and given back all he had plus interest! Job is faithful to God and God is also faithful to him. He ended up living a long a meaningful life with the time dedicated to his troubles only a small portion of his time on the earth. His suffering was dedicated to God through faith, and through witness he glorified God.

Jesus, is asked about faith and he responds, using the metaphor of the mustard seed, that even the smallest amount of faith is sufficient to do great things. (v. 5-6)

In our second lesson we find the Apostles asking Jesus about faith and wanting to understand how to increase it. Jesus, using the metaphor of the mustard seed, explains how even a tiny bit of true faith can achieve amazing things. This tiny seed can cause a domino effect of change. We see metaphorically that Jesus tells us that even the smallest amount of faith, can have the biggest impact. Even just a little bit of belief, can move mountains and increase our understanding of how we fit into God's plan for us and for the world He gave His only son to save. During his time on Earth, Jesus states that the kingdom of God, like that tiny seed, was unseen to the point that it seemed insignificant. Jesus taught that the Kingdom of God would grow large, and He was showing the power of God to do His work through whatever instrument He chooses. It will often be in a small way, or seemingly insignificant manner, that He works, but that is to His glory!

Jesus reminds us to be humble in our lives, as we toil and work, and do our duty before God. (v. 7-10)

From the Epistle to the Hebrews (11:1 KJV) "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."

From the Gospel of Matthew (25:14-30) we may remember the parable of the master who gave talents to his servants and Jesus stated that this is like the kingdom of heaven. You will recall that in the parable, a rich man set off on a journey, having first entrusted some of his servants with large sums of money for safekeeping during his absence. It is a privilege to be entrusted with talents, resources, and opportunities to work toward God's purposes in the world. The implication of the parable is that we if we do so, we take our place among all the

faithful, trustworthy servants of God, no matter how big or small our accomplishments may seem.

From our Gospel reading today, and considering this parable of the talents in tandem, we can see that in the reality of our lives we are unable to live up to what God expects from us. Despite that, God loves us and wants us to continue in faith that through our labors and talents we will do good things and glorify Him. We must act humbly before our God and be faithful to labor and toil in the duty God has graciously assigned us.

The common lesson of these two parables is that merely fulfilling our basic duties is not enough to gain us any merit, especially not any merit in the eyes of God. All our religious observances, doing good deeds, loving our neighbor, and our attendance in church, are our “bounden duty and service” for which we can expect no special reward or privilege. No matter how much we ever do, it will never be enough to overcome the affronts our sins have given to God. It is indeed not what we do, but who we are that matters.

As the XII (12th) Article of Religion teaches us, the good works of the faithful are pleasing to God and are do “spring out necessarily from a true and lively faith”. However, they cannot put away our sins or the severity of God’s judgement. Good works reveal nothing to God, for He already knows how real our faith is and He is aware of how great our sin is. As we say in our confession to God, “Unto whom all hearts are open, all desires known and from whom no secrets are hid.”

Action:

Unfortunately, in this world sin is an ever-present reality, and if, even when we have done everything God has commanded us, we still get no extra privilege in our divine judgement.

So, what can we as sinful people do in this world? How are we to be saved, that is, brought into fellowship with God, if we cannot earn that privilege? The truth is we are to be saved only through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. We are “justified”, that is, accounted righteous before God, not for anything we ourselves have done but, through the grace of God through our Lord Jesus Christ’s “one full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction, for the sins of the whole world.”

We must humble ourselves in our lives and have faith that by the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross we are redeemed. As Bishop Giffin preached about a few weeks ago, remember to start your prayers thanking God for this gift and for all the blessings and talents you have been given. Reach out to God not just when things are going wrong, or you are struggling, but when things are going great, and you are feeling blessed. Like Job experienced, every trial or negative experience is a season and if we stay focused on God and our faith remains strong, we will endure. Psalm 30:5 states, "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning."

Conclusion:

I would like to think my faith in God is larger than a mustard seed, maybe as large as a cashew or something! The message in our lesson for today is important as our lives, our world and the ever-present enemy will erode our faith and perhaps even cause us to question whether God is present in our lives. When we come to church, when we pray and silence our thoughts before God, when we open our hearts, we will continue to feel God's presence. Jesus is saying in this parable that if you have faith, even the smallest amount as in a mustard seed you can accomplish what may seem impossible. Job's faith, despite his circumstances, kept him in union with God. Job was not interested in gifts or having his life be free of burden, but rather staying in the constant presence of God.

From the Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians, "My grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness." Paul understood this gift and states (12:10) "Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distress, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak then I am strong."

Let us all continue to have faith and when we are weak let Christ strengthen us.

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.