

The Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost, Year C  
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St Paul's Episcopal Church, Key West, FL  
October 2, 2022  
Lamentations 1:1-6  
Psalm 137  
2 Timothy 1:1-14  
Luke 17:5-10

## Increase Our Faith

*Increase our faith.* That's what the disciples, now apostles, ask Jesus at the beginning of today's gospel. *Increase our faith.*

It's not just a request; it's a plea, a prayer. They are begging.

They have been traveling with Jesus from place to place, and they have just about lost the plot. They're not quite sure how much more of this they can take.

In the last little while leading up to today's gospel, here are some of the things that have happened:

Jesus warned them to always be ready; counseled them not to be hypocrites; told them to discern the times; encouraged them to confess fearlessly; taught them they shouldn't worry.

He's talked about the need for repentance; healed a crippled woman on the sabbath and had an altercation with synagogue leaders; told stories about mustard seed and yeast and narrow doors; taught them to always choose the least honorable seats at banquets; instructed them to invite the least likely people of all if and when they ever throw a banquet themselves. Then he gave them some cryptic advice about calculating the costs of building towers and assessing the risks of going into battle and topped that off with an order to give up all their possessions.

And then he told them not to lose their saltiness or they would be worthless. Then he told stories about a lost sheep, a lost coin, a lost son. Then it kinda seemed like he told them they should be like a dishonest steward and super shrewd in their dealings with other people. And then he held forth about divorce and adultery. And then he told a story about a rich man going to hell and a poor man named Lazarus resting in the bosom of Abraham. And just before where we pick up today he said that people are bound to stumble from time to time, but if they—the disciples of Jesus—were the cause of anyone stumbling it would be better for a millstone to be hung around their necks and them be thrown into the sea.

That's most of what's gone down in Luke's gospel from chapter 12 to the beginning

of chapter 17. We pick up today with chapter 17, verse 5 where the disciples, now apostles, are saying, begging, pleading, praying, “Lord, Jesus, increase our faith!”

It’s been the ride of their lives, and truth be told it’s just about been too much. They really don’t know which way is up at this point. So many encounters with different kinds of people. So much to learn. So much gained, but so much lost. So many changes. Can you relate?

So, they ask Jesus for something. Give us something. We need it. Increase our faith.

I don’t know about you, but it sounds to me like they think Jesus can give them faith.

Sounds like maybe they think of faith as a commodity, as a thing that can be quantified, counted, distributed.

But is that what faith is? Is that really how it works?

Increase our faith. Make a deposit in our faith account for us because we asked. We asked because we need it. You told us to ask for what we need.

Jesus has been on a pretty good tear for over five chapters now. And he doesn’t let up here.

Jesus’ answer to their request for an increase of faith gives us another of the hard teachings we encounter in Luke’s gospel. Did you hear how he answered them?

*“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.*

Wait, what? Does that mean we already have enough faith or that we don’t have any?

And how did he go off on all that about a slave who had to work in the field *and* serve dinner *and* not be thanked?

Um, Jesus, do you mean we should make unreasonable demands of other people and never say thank you? Surely you aren’t saying we should have slaves or condone slavery. Wait, do you mean we are slaves, your slaves, Jesus? Can we please get on to John’s gospel where you say nicer things like calling us friends not slaves and servants?

*Increase our faith.* They are asking, begging, pleading, praying. It doesn’t seem like

Jesus gives them a very helpful answer.

First off, faith isn't a commodity we can acquire or a thing we can quantify, count, or distribute. It's a relationship. It's really something more akin to trust. Deep, abiding trust. Reliance upon God. God the Creator. And in Jesus the Christ, the son of God, relying on him, even when we cannot understand his answers or his teachings very clearly. And relying on the Holy Spirit, the counselor, the comforter who is with us until the end of the age and who will guide us into all truth. And from this abiding, deepening, growing trust in the Trinity we can learn to trust ourselves and each other. Again and again.

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The lectionary gives us multiple lessons each week in addition to the gospel. Though it isn't always abundantly clear, the readings each week are in a kind of conversation with one another. And we are in a kind of conversation with them and with all the other Christians around the world who this day are reading these same readings.

And in the midst of today's conversation, for my money, a better answer to the apostles' sincere and desperate request that Jesus increase their faith is found in the reading from 2 Timothy 'cause I don't know about you, but I don't find a lot of help in that first reading except that it seems appropriate this day: "How lonely sits the city that once was full of people." Doesn't that sound about like Fort Myers Beach right now in the wake of such devastation and loss?

And that psalm starts out pretty great but ends with one of the worst verses in the entire Bible. It's a little hard to get on board with that sometimes.

But the author writes to Timothy, in that second reading, *Rekindle the gift of God that is in you*. This is possibly the way to increase our faith, our trust: to stir up the gift of God within us. It's there. You may not feel it right now. It may be dormant, but it isn't dead.

*Rekindle the gift of God that is in you. Why?*

Because *God has not given us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline*. Or as the King James puts it, "God hath not given us the spirit of fear and timidity; but of power, and of love, and a sound mind."

Then the writer to Timothy says this: *Guard the good treasure entrusted to you, with the help of the Holy Spirit living in us*. Not just living in Paul or Timothy but within us.

Within you, within me, within us there is good treasure. Treasure in and of these earthen vessels we walk around in and live in, that will return to dust. Good treasure. It's entrusted to us. Part of that treasure is that faith, that trust, that reliance that the disciples were so desperate to increase. If you feel you are also in need of a faith infusion, you've come to the right place.

*Guard the good treasure entrusted to you. How? with the help of the Holy Spirit living in us. Seriously y'all, the help of the Holy Spirit. Living in us. Good news. That is good news.*

The gift of God that is in you. Power, love, and a sound mind. The good treasure entrusted to you. The Holy Spirit living in us.

Don't forget who you are. Don't forget whose you are. Don't forget your belovedness. Don't forget your giftedness. Don't forget your belongingness.

And if you have forgotten, it's okay. That's why we come again and again to this table. To remember. For *anamnesis*. Literally, to unforget. Together.

Increase our faith means increase our trust, our reliance; increase our capacity for relationship with each other and with this Jesus who invites us over and over and over not to believe things about him but to walk alongside him and live his life. This faith, this trust helps us come to the table together. And it helps us stay at the table even when the news is hard and the answers aren't easy.

Rekindle the gift of God that is in you.

Guard the good treasure entrusted to you with the help of the Holy Spirit.

By this our trust, our reliance, our capacity for relationship, our faith will increase.  
AMEN.