

**THE SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER
PENTECOST – PROPER 22
OCTOBER 2, 2022**



Increase Our Faith

Luke 17:5-10

St. John United Church of Christ
10207 Lincoln Trail, Fairview Heights, IL
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CALL TO WORSHIP:

Increase our faith!

Let our worship uncover clearer understandings of you.

Increase our trust!

Let our worship unearth stronger connections to you.

Increase our hope!

Let our worship unleash fresher possibilities from you.

INVOCATION:

Meet us here with all our questions and insecurities.

Challenge our knowledge and certainties. Transform our beliefs and perceptions. Influence our commitments and actions.

PRAYER OF TRANSFORMATION & WORDS OF GRACE:

We don't always get what you mean, Storytelling Jesus. We want to be better followers, so we exclaim, "Increase our faith!" Your response exposes our flawed approach, well-intentioned though it may be. Forgive us for transacting our faith for your favor.

God's abundance is illogical and immeasurable. Though we may not understand it, we are yet worthy of basking in the undeserved goodness of God. Praise be!

SCRIPTURE TEXTS: **Luke 17:5-10** ⁵ The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!" ⁶ The Lord replied, "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.

⁷ "Would any of you say to your servant, who had just come in from the field after plowing or tending sheep, 'Come! Sit down for dinner?' ⁸ Wouldn't you say instead, 'Fix my dinner. Put on the clothes of a table servant and wait on me while I eat and drink. After that, you can eat and drink?' ⁹ You won't thank the servant because the servant did what you asked, will you? ¹⁰ In the same way, when you have done everything required of you, you should say, 'We servants deserve no special praise. We have only done our duty.'"

MESSAGE: "Is More Better?" Pepper, salt, sugar; if a little bit helps, won't more work better? In some cases, yes. In others no. Like us, the disciples tend to think that more is better. If they could have just a little bit more faith, everything in the world would be perfect. That's one of the mind-sets Jesus taught for us to change.

The other myth the disciples and all the ancient people had was that if you were rich, it meant that God had blessed you. If you were poor, it meant that God did not bless you. God only cared about the rich people, not the

poor or oppressed. Today, we still have problem with what is big and what is small. Which is valued more?

The disciples wanted to be like Jesus. He had done so many wonderful things; fed 5000 people, healed the sick, made the blind see. How could they live up to that? There's no way that they could do what Jesus did with their puny faith. Jesus said "no". He told the disciples they could move mountains with just the faith of a tiny mustard seed. Jesus said we are thinking about all this the wrong way. Bigger does not necessarily mean better.

Being faithful is doing what God would have us do in the world even when we think our faith is incomplete and doesn't measure up. Jesus is not a figure skating judge who rates us on our faith. Are we 10's or 4's?

Have you noticed god's preference for small things? Gideon, the weakest guy in the land of Israel is called by God to defeat an occupying army. His 300 men defeat thousands on the other side. Samuel choses the youngest son of Jesse to become the King David of Israel. God chooses a young, poor woman – living in Israel under the Roman occupation, as the one to give birth to Jesus. God is using what little we have and performing great works. God doesn't call us to believe

“enough”. God calls us to be faithful - to seek to do God’s work in the world.

Faithfulness is about being a witness to the grace and mercy of Jesus. It’s about trusting in God’s faithfulness to us even when our faith is wavering. We are faithful when we proclaim the good news and do acts of compassion, even on those days when our faith seems small.

It’s faithful to pray with a family when they learn their loved one is not going to get better. It’s faithful to bring communion to a church member who can’t make it to worship. I’m sure you can think of other ways we can be faithful in this crazy, broken world of ours. TRUST GOD TO BE FAITHFUL TO EACH OF US. IN TURN WE ARE FAITHFUL TO WHAT GOD HAS DONE FOR US. WE TRUST GOD TO CONTINUE GOD’S BLESSINGS TO US AS WE ARE FAITHFUL TO OTHERS. AMEN.

PASTORAL PRAYER:

Here we are, Lord. Listening to your words that challenge us. You call us to be servants in service to others, no matter the need. You call us to use our faith, which may seem small to us, but to someone else, our faithful acts of kindness can move mountains.

Mountains of hate, oppression. Mountains of poverty. Mountains of hungry children.

Most holy God, you did not call us to hate others. To hurt others. To ignore others, who may not agree with us. God, you call us to love and be compassionate. That’s it. So simple, yet we forget. Give us mercy and give us strength to start each day to find one loving thing to do for just one person.

What would that look like in our world? Each one, help one. That would be proclaiming your good news in a world that seems to have a lack of good news. Help us be a light in a dark world. A person of duty when there is none. A compassionate person, where there is none. To be people of faith, no matter the size.

THE LORD’S PRAYER: Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be your name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

INVITATION TO GENEROSITY:

If tiny mustard seeds can produce unruly and enormous plants that contagiously spread and impact their

landscapes, so too can our cents, seconds, and cells, which we are now invited to graciously share.

PRAYER OF DEDICATION AND THANKSGIVING:

We thank you for these gifts of money, time, and selves that we cheerfully give to you, Multiplying God. Expand and bless every single one in service to you and the work you've called us to do. Amen.

HOLY COMMUNION:

May God be with you.

And also with you.

People of God, lift up your hearts.

We lift them to the One who cradles our hearts in loving hands. People of God, let us give thanks to the God who sets a Table for us.

We praise the Lord our God who welcomes us with open arms.

How lonely was chaos, Gardener of the Universe, until you spoke a Word, and your Spirit created: leaves that burnish gold and red in autumn, snow that drifts lazily in winter skies, frozen brooks that burst in spring, ponds splashing with children in summer.

You planted the seeds of joy in our ancestors hoping they would pass them onto us, but they walked sin's lonely streets and drank the bitter tears death offered.

Though the prophets came to remind us of your great faithfulness, we continued to feast on the wormwood and gall offered by the world. But you would not forget us, and so sent Jesus to bring us home to you.

Therefore we join our voices, as we speak of your mercies made fresh in every moment

*God of Creation, Lord of all beauty,
All creatures join in singing your love;
Holy Compassion, Joy of our mornings,
Fill us with grace which comes from above.*

You alone are holy, heart Speaker, and we are blessed through Jesus, life's Promise. When we would wander the lonely streets of the world, he would take us by the hand, to lead us into your joy. When others would pass on bitterness and hate to us, he fills us with the gifts of hope and love.

Splashing in sin's puddles, he washed our feet and dried them with his love, leading us into the kingdom.

Daughters of despair, sons of sadness, orphans of woe - he gathers us all up in his arms of mercy wiping out death, and sits us down at the family Table.

As we remember his grace and love, as we dare not forget his sacrifice for us, we sing of that mystery we call

faith:

*Christ of the outcast, Comfort of mourners,
Neighbor to strangers, Love without end;
Bearer of burdens, Grace ever with us,
Blessing our children, Brother and Friend.*

Holy Spirit, as we offer the gifts of the bread and the cup for your blessing, so we present ourselves: our accomplishments, our failings, our hopes, our realities. Make us weak, so we might rely on your strength. As we have heard the Word, may we listen to the cries of the poor. As we are family with those sitting beside us today, may we love our sisters and brothers in every corner of creation. As you hold out the bread and the cup to us, may we reach out to enemies to clasp hands as friends. God in Community, Holy in One, all honor and glory are yours, as we sing our praises through all eternity:

*Spirit of kindness, Breath of forgiveness,
Faithful Companion, just as Christ said;
God's little children gathered together,
Drink of salvation, feast on your Bread.*

SHARING THE ELEMENTS:

BENEDICTION:

As we go back into the ordinariness of the world out there, may God infuse our whole selves with the specialness that we've created here together. Let it shape everything we say and do as bearers of God's image. May it be so!

Increase Our Faith: *Service Prayers for after Pentecost* were written by The Rev. Phiwa Langeni.

Communion liturgy written by Rev. Thom Shuman.