

Gospel - Luke 17:1–10

¹[Jesus] said to his disciples, “Temptations to sin are sure to come, but woe to the one through whom they come! ²It 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. ³Pay attention to yourselves! If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him, ⁴and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, saying, ‘I repent,’ you must forgive him.”

⁵The apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our faith!” ⁶And 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.

⁷“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’? ⁸Will 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’? ⁹Does he thank the servant because he did what was commanded? ¹⁰So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.’”

INTRO - About 25 years ago, when I was pastor in Palmer, the head of my Trustees board sat down in my office. There had been a significant disagreement in the hallway between two other men on the board. This head Trustee intervened. Afterward, he told me, “Pastor, I can work on boilers, and carpets, and roofs, and I can do drywall and painting. But dealing with people is TOUGH!” I understood him but said, “Guess what? The church is in the people business.”

I. Perhaps you understand my trustees. Perhaps today’s assigned Gospel lesson made you a little nervous. It does me.

A. Jesus talks about sin, and temptation, and God’s special care for children and then shares what, if we look closely, are hard words of how God’s people deal with sin.

1. If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him, ⁴and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, saying, ‘I repent,’ you must forgive him.”

2. How many of you like to confront someone who has done something morally wrong, contrary to God's call to love Him and love others. It's hard to do!
3. Maybe forgiving is harder. How many like to, or even can, forgive someone who hurts us, and asks forgiveness. How many can forgive time and time again?

B. No wonder the disciple react the way they did. **"Increase our faith!"**

1. I have been watching the very well done TV series, "Chosen" which depicts the ministry of Jesus. There is actually a scene depicting part of this incident. I can picture the character playing Peter hearing the call to rebuke and to forgive, and then shaking his head as he says, **"Increase our faith!"** Lord, you are asking for something difficult.
2. Or, I can see a hurting mother at St. John telling me why she could not forgive the person who hurt her. "Pastor, I know I am supposed to forgive, I just can't"
3. This call of Jesus is meat, not milk.

C. And, lets add one more problem to this difficult call.

1. It is one thing when we know what God says about right and wrong, when it is plain. But, what if the idea of what is right and wrong isn't God's declaration, but our opinion?
2. And what if we deal with a situation with the right ideas, but deal with it in the wrong way? In Ephesians 4:15 we are told, **speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ**, Speaking the TRUTH in LOVE, is hard!
3. No wonder the disciples asked, requested from their Lord, no wonder they prayed even, **"Increase our faith!"**

II. Perhaps you read one of my recent devotions entitled, "Learning again how much I don't know." I had a light out in my garage and when new bulbs did not help, I replaced the fixture. But, I still could not get the light to work. I had two electricians come and look. The second one told me, you are using the wrong kind of bulbs. When I bought the correct bulbs, BAM, it worked. There is something in this lesson which we don't know. When we deal with sin, with our temptations, or the sin of others, its NOT FIRST OF ALL ABOUT US!

A. In Matthew 18:15 Jesus teaches, **"If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother.**

1. If we rebuke someone, its not about US being right.

2. If we go to someone and talk about sin, it's about gaining them. It's about helping their relationship with God, and ours.

B. Again, When we deal with sin, with our temptations, or the sin of others, its not first of all about us. Listen to Jesus' words to His disciples.

1. **⁵The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!" ⁶And 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.**

2. Faith is not about what WE do, it is trusting GOD.

3. Faith is not about what we do, it is about what God can accomplish, even through sinners like us

4. When we face sin, we do so with the righteousness, the forgiveness, the redemption of Jesus. It is GOD working.

C. That is one of the reasons why Jesus tells the story about the servant. He was just doing what he was told. We are all unworthy.

1. So, in regard to these difficult teaching, Jesus is saying, "Actually, you are sinful, I am the savior. When you follow my lead, when you surrender to my guidance and trust my help, I am accomplishing the redemption of sinful people."

2. You see, faith is about trust. Christian faith is about trusting GOD.

3. If do what Jesus says, it is by faith. We don't deserve credit, God does. We are sinful, But God can and does work GREAT things, even through sinners like us

III. Today Jesus calls His disciples, he calls the church, he calls us to a difficult task. Watch out for sin and temptation in your own life. Rebuke and forgive sin in others.

A. He gives us 3 wise steps

1. First, trust God for this difficult task.

2. Second, because we trust the Lord, do what is right.

3. Finally, give thanks and praise to him when He works even through our efforts

B. The only reason sinful people can face sin in a Godly way is Jesus

1. Jesus is the Son of God, and Mary's son, and lived a righteous life. Jesus is sinless.

2. Jesus is the perfect man who died, not to pay for His sins, but for ours, and those of the whole world. Jesus forgives.
3. He came to seek and to save the lost, and He calls us to do the same. Jesus redeems.

CONCLUSION - I was telling someone the other day what I have come to believe about the work of the church of Jesus. Spreading the kingdom of Jesus through faith and love is a holy task. The only problems is that Jesus calls sinners to do this holy work. It is a recipe for disaster. The church can be, and is messy. Just look at the congregations in the New Testament, and look today. Some may say, I don't want this mess and go somewhere else. That is understandable, if immature. The mature thing is to say, Jesus died for me. I will work in His church for Him.

So, for today's difficult lesson, It is because of JESUS that we can trust God. It is because of JESUS that we can do the difficult work to which he called us. It is because of JESUS that God works even through us, and that we can give Him praise.