

Be Who You Are
Luke 17:5-10
First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
October 5, 2025
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As Traci said, this text has a lot to wrestle with. Actually we don't even get the full impact when we read it, as we did today, from *The Message*. And honestly, that was part of my strategy.

Because when we read this same passage from a more traditional version like the New Revised Standard Version that we usually read, we hear what feels, to we modern people, like *much* stronger language with the use of the word "slave" and even the phrase "worthless slaves". And the reality is that sometimes language can shut us down and cause us to stop listening.

So, today I chose for us to read it from *The Message* so that we could listen differently.

But, first, let's remember what is going on here in the Gospel of Luke.

Jesus has been doing ministry for a while now. He is, as we mentioned last week, attracting crowds. At this point in Luke's gospel Jesus is getting closer and closer to Jerusalem. And with Jerusalem comes the cross.

If we go back and read the chapter before what Traci read for us today we will see that Jesus' conversations are vacillating between conversations with the smaller group of disciples, conversations with tax collectors and sinners, and conversations with the religious leaders who always seem to be just on the edge listening in.

And then, if we read beyond today's verses we will see that verse 11 begins saying, "On the way to Jerusalem..." Now while we might assume that is just a statement about geography, the reality is that in Luke's gospel, once his ministry has begun, Jesus only goes to Jerusalem one time and that is where his life ends. So, this story is positioned as Jesus draws closer and closer to the end of his life.

Add to that that Luke, chapter 17 opens with Jesus telling his disciples, likely in response to the push back he has been getting from religious leaders, how important it is that they never be a stumbling block to the faith of others...and then following that with a statement about how generously they are expected to offer forgiveness...with all that it is easy to see why they get overwhelmed.

It's not only the disciples who get overwhelmed by those statements. We do, too. After all, even when we are trying, we are likely to make missteps and it *is* a big responsibility to be sure not to mislead someone. Add to that the idea that forgiveness is to be offered not just once, but over and over again, and suddenly being a person of faith feels like a big responsibility.

So, this is where our reading began.

"Give us more faith," the disciples said to Jesus.

And we can't blame them. After all, they have been accompanying him in his ministry. They have been there for the highs, for the impressive moments, for the times when everyone seems to be his biggest fan. But they are also acutely aware of the threats not only to his ministry but his life; they know how hard this work has been, that it comes with around-the-clock demands.

And then Jesus, he asks big things of them and they don't feel like they have what they need.

"Give us more faith," they say.

But instead of pulling out a magic wand and planting bigger faith within them, Jesus tells them that they already have it. In fact, he says - a mere drop, a bit the size of the tiniest seed, can multiply in amazing ways.

With that he goes on with, what to us feels like a confusing example, saying "Suppose one of you has a servant who comes in from plowing the field or tending the sheep. Would you take his coat, set the table, and say, 'Sit down and eat'? Wouldn't you be more likely to say, 'Prepare dinner; change your clothes and wait table for me until I've finished my coffee; then go to the kitchen and have your supper'? Does the servant get special thanks for doing what's expected of him? It's the same with you. When you've done everything expected of you, be matter-of-fact and say, 'The work is done. What we were told to do, we did'" (Luke 17:7-10, *The Message*).

And if we can keep from getting stuck in this uncomfortable structure of servants or slaves, this structure we are grateful not to live in, then we can hear something important.

Because in this Jesus isn't putting down the servant or pushing them into their lowly place. But rather this example connects back to the disciples' request for more faith. And Jesus is simply saying, "Be who you are."

They lived in a time and place where servants and masters were simply a part of the social fabric. Reflecting on that is not an affirmation of the system, so much as it is Jesus using a common example that they would have been familiar with, a way to say: just as the servant does their job, so you - people of faith - are to live your lives the way God designed.

Here are the disciples, inevitably tired and stressed and overwhelmed. And in this moment, they don't feel like they have what they need as Jesus' companions and coworkers.

"Give us more faith," they say.

But Jesus responds saying, "You have what you need. Do what you know. Live from your very creation."

So, what does any of this have to do with World Communion Sunday? After all, as we've already heard, as you see in the way the table is set...today *is* World Communion Sunday. It is that time when we celebrate the oneness of the church, the ecumenical connections and efforts that are and can be made. It is the day when we remember that people around the world are coming to the table, with different elements and different languages and different liturgical practices, but connected to the same Jesus, remembering the same table where he gathered a final time with his disciples.

And this is a beautiful celebration, a reminder that we are part of something bigger than ourselves.

Meanwhile, we live in times when Christian unity seems lacking, when even those of us who follow Jesus sometimes aren't sure how to claim the word "Christian" anymore because of the ways we have seen it used to demean and abuse people, to strip creation of resources, to separate people into us and them.

Unfortunately we live in a world...

- where war and conflict are encouraged in the name of the Prince of Peace,
- where people claiming to be followers of Jesus are using their platforms for division rather than unity,
- where people in our own community are chastised by evangelical ministers for being part of congregations led by female clergy,
- where people, who all claim to follow Jesus, can't take communion together because some of them believe that theirs is the only way to do it,
- where a prosperity gospel claims if you are rich you must have done something to please God while the poor just need to be more faithful,
- where too many who claim to be Christian are hell bent on kicking out the stranger, starving the hungry, and oppressing those for whom the system has never worked anyway.

And yet we follow a Savior...

- whose first visitors were outcasts,
- who knew what it was to live as a political refugee with protected status,
- who spent his career as an itinerant preacher depending on the kindness and generosity of others,
- who ate with people across nationality and race, beyond boundaries shaped by gender norms,
- who was far more likely to critique the people in power than to attack those who were just making it through the day.

And so today, even as we want to, as we try to celebrate World Communion Sunday, we might feel overwhelmed. The idea of Christian unity, so central to the movement that birthed our denomination, might feel far out of reach. Even claiming a Christianity that is actually rooted in the Jesus we follow might feel tough to defend.

We might find ourselves wondering if we have what we need to be followers of Jesus in this world. We might find ourselves calling out, "Give *us* more faith."

But if we listen closely, we might also hear Jesus responding with the reminder that we do have what we need, that we do know who he is, that we simply need to be who God created us to be.

And so, on this World Communion Sunday, we hear a call to return to humility...to let the heart of God rule over our lives...to live in ways that reflect Jesus, the one who was compassionate and generous, who fought for justice and mercy, who shared grace in abundance, and who prayed that the world may be one. Amen.