Title: Faith Feeds the Journey
10/5 Sermon – 12th Sunday after Pentecost
Rev. Lindsey Odom
Reading from the Old Testament: Lamentations 3:19-26
Reading from the New Testament: Luke 17:5-10

Has there ever been a moment in your life when you've thought, "Lord, I need more faith than I have right now"? Imagine sitting in the quiet of a hospital room, waiting for the doctor to walk in with results that could change everything, praying for enough faith to process whatever the result may be. Imagine being a parent at the kitchen table late at night, running numbers and bills, wondering how you'll stretch what you have to cover what your family needs, and struggling to have enough faith to believe that God will provide. Imagine standing at a graveside, with grief, tears, loss, and heartbreak so heavy that you can hardly breathe, whispering for enough faith to take the next step forward without the one you've loved. Imagine the ache of a broken relationship, wondering if you could ever forgive or be forgiven, and asking for enough faith to try again. Imagine turning on the evening news and seeing war, destruction, and injustice, and longing to have enough faith to believe that peace is still possible and that our world is not beyond the redemption of Jesus Christ. Imagine being a parent, weary, overwhelmed, and discouraged from trying to raise your children and youth in a culture filled with fear, division, and frightening headlines, praying for enough faith to teach them justice, hope, love, and resilience. Imagine someone from a minority community, perhaps a young person in the LGBTQIA+ community, hearing policies that deny their dignity, and struggling to have enough faith to trust that God has created them beloved and whole. Imagine anyone on the edge of despair, clinging to a whispered prayer, asking for enough faith to believe that God is still at work, even when it feels impossible to see. These are the kinds of moments when faith feels

small and fragile, and it is here, just like the disciples so long ago, that we find ourselves crying out, “Lord, increase our faith!” (Luke 17:5).

And this is exactly why we need a “*Faith that Feeds the Journey*.” We need a faith that feeds us and our journey with God. We need a faith that does more than sit on the surface, but one that nourishes us day by day as we strive to walk more closely with God and with each other. The disciples understood that faith and the growth of their faith were not something they could earn or muster up on their own since faith is a gift from God. And who among us does not want more faith? Most of us are NOT surprised at the disciples’ plea for Jesus to give them more faith, because we have prayed the very same thing ourselves.

In our Scripture text for this morning from Luke 17:5-10, it consists of two sections beginning with verses 5-6 where Jesus responds to the disciples’ request for more faith and then verses 7 through 10, which presents the parable of the Worthless Slaves to make a central point about faith, not being something we measure or quantify, wondering how much is enough, but something we live out, allowing it to become a way of life.

Given the verses that precede our passage this morning (verses 1-4), we can understand why the disciples might ask for more faith. Jesus “has just told them that discipleship is more demanding than they imagined. Jesus has just told them that drowning in a sea would be preferable to causing a brother or sister to go astray, revealing how they are accountable to each other (*Feasting on the Word*, Year C, Volume 4 Commentary, pg. 142).” Additionally, in verses 3-4 that come before our scripture passage for today, Jesus tells “the disciples that if they are wronged, they are called to draw from a bottomless well of forgiveness, forgiving again and again, even when it seems impossible (*Feasting on the Word*, Year C, Volume 4 Commentary, pg. 142).” Even before Luke 17, the disciples had been immersed in a pattern of challenge, call,

and dependence on God, making the demands of discipleship feel very overwhelming. For example in Luke chapter 9, the disciples are sent out on a mission with nothing but the clothes on their backs, called to rely completely on God's provision, and they hear Jesus teach about the cost of discipleship by leaving family, possessions, and personal comfort, and even speak plainly about suffering and rejection. So, it is no wonder that the disciples respond, "Increase our faith." They are unsure they are up to the task.

So, by the time we arrive at Luke 17, it is no wonder the disciples feel uncertain about their capacity to follow Jesus. Here, Jesus lays out the radical demands of discipleship: don't cause others to stumble, hold one another accountable, and extend forgiveness without limit, even to someone who sins against you seven times in a single day. The disciples feel like these tasks given by Jesus are too much, that they are not enough.

But Jesus shifts the focus from *how much faith is enough* to *what faith is for*—from faith being something quantifiable to faith becoming a lifeline, shaping who we are and how we live. In the original Greek, the word for faith is πίστις (pistis), from which we get the accusative form πίστιν (pistin) in this passage. This word can mean belief, trust, reliance, confidence, or assurance. Yet more than mere intellectual assent, pistis almost always carries an *active* meaning: a lived confidence and trust in God. Faith is not simply agreeing that God exists; it is entrusting your life to God. Faith is always dynamic, relational, and embodied—it is something we do as much as something we believe.

And then comes the parable of the Worthless Slaves in verses 7–10, which follows directly after the disciples' plea for more faith. At first glance, it sounds jarring to us as it explains how a servant works all day in the fields, and when the servant comes in, the master does not invite the servant to sit down but expects the servant to prepare supper. Jesus then asks, "Do you thank the

servant for doing what was commanded?" and concludes, "So you also, when you have done all that you were ordered to do, say, 'We are worthless slaves; we have done only what we ought to have done" in verses 9 and 10. Now, as you might have noticed, this parable uses the institution of slavery, an institution extremely common in Jesus' day but one that is deeply painful, oppressive, and dangerous in our own history. To modern ears, it is difficult to hear Jesus speak this way, and the parable remains both uncomfortable and perplexing. But within the first-century world, Jesus describes a relationship between master and servant in which the servant, though underappreciated, is not congratulated simply for doing their ordinary duty. The master expects the servant to perform their role, and the servant, in turn, expects nourishment, rest, and protection as part of the arrangement. Through the lens of Scripture and our Reformed tradition, this parable is not meant to demean human worth but to redefine faith. It presses us to see that faith is not a possession we leverage, meaning it is NOT something we produce in ourselves, something we control, something to accomplish and become proud of, nor a badge of honor, but instead faith is a way of life lived in humble obedience to God. As the Westminster Confession reminds us, "Faith is the instrument by which we receive and apply Christ and his benefits." Faith is never about proving ourselves worthy; rather, it is about living in response to God's grace that has already been given.

Faith is a real, ongoing, ever-deepening relationship between Christ and us. It is a relationship rooted in trust and love. It entails opening ourselves to receive Christ's life and, in turn, giving our lives to Christ. Faith is a way of life that includes a call to serve and a commitment to act. Faith is lived out as obedience to a just and loving God. As biblical scholar Kimberly Bracken Long puts it, "trusting in the one with whom we are in relationship, we relinquish any illusions

of self-reliance, acknowledging that faith cannot be measured, only enacted" (*Feasting on the Word, Year C, Volume 4,* p. 144).

This is why Jesus tells the disciples they don't need ***more*** faith. Looking at his frightened and overwhelmed followers, he promises them they already have what it takes to live faithfully and to do his work in the world. Even the smallest faith, a mustard seed-sized faith, is enough. He says in verse 6, "If you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it will obey you." With this response, Jesus reframes the question at the heart of discipleship. It is not about "How much faith is enough?" but "What is faith for?" The issue is not the quantity of faith, but the quality of it, the trust it places in God and the way it is lived out.

That is why Jesus follows with the provocative parable of the worthless slaves, which unsettles us with its imagery, but it also pushes us deeper into the truth. The parable challenges any transactional view of discipleship, where we expect recognition or reward from God simply for doing what is asked of us. Instead, faith is not something we manufacture or measure; rather, it is God's work in us and through us. It is not a status to claim, but a way of life lived in response to God's grace. As Matthew 17:20 says, a mustard seed faith is the kind of faith that can move mountains, because it takes hold of the God for whom "nothing is impossible."

And here is the promise: even a mustard seed-sized faith is sufficient to face the impossible, difficult things Jesus asks of us. Because Jesus has already gone before us, lived for us, and sacrificed his life for us on the cross, so we are not left to muster faith on our own. Instead, if we live continually in Christ's presence, Christ will teach us what he calls us to do and empower us to live it out. Christ will be able to transform us for Christ's purposes if we commit to living,

moving, and having our being in and through Christ. When we open ourselves to Christ in this way, we discover the mystery of being in Christ and Christ being in us. And as we live, move, and have our being in him, Christ transforms us for his purposes and equips us to be his people in the world.

And that is where we begin to see how our scripture text speaks into our lives today because this mustard-seed faith is not just about surviving or getting through on our own strength; rather, it is about being fed and sustained by Christ for the journey ahead. A *Faith that feeds the journey* is not flashy or measurable, but instead, it is a daily, ordinary trust in the One who goes before us and empowers us. And on this World Communion Sunday, we remember that our journey of faith is never traveled alone. On this World Communion Sunday, we celebrate that we join with our Christian siblings across the globe as we gather around the Communion table. At Christ's table, we are joined with brothers and sisters across the globe, across time, and across every dividing line we, as humans, create/ construct. This table extends far beyond our places of worship, and there is always room for all. Here, at Christ's table, we discover over and over again that even when our faith feels small, Christ provides what we need, what we cannot provide for ourselves. That need looks different for each of us, yet at its heart it is the same: nourishment for weary souls who are hungry for hope, grace to forgive and be forgiven when we fall short, and strength to live as Christ-empowered disciples in our world. We need courage when fear overwhelms us, peace when chaos surrounds us and belonging when we feel alone. We need to know that our story is held in God's greater story of love, grace, redemption, and belonging.

We see and experience this most clearly around Christ's table and in communion with one another. Around Christ's table, no one brings "enough" faith; rather, we all come in need—need

of mercy, need of healing, and need of love that will not let us go. And it is there, at the table, in fellowship with each other, and in the ordinary elements of the bread and cup, that Christ meets every need with abundance, grace, and love. Christ meets us here at the table and gives us the bread of life that sustains the journey. Our scripture text reminds us that faith is not about our ability, it is about trust. Faith is not about measurement; it is about living in humble service and obedience to Christ. So perhaps the question for us today is this: What does it look like for you, for us together as the church, to embody faith not as something to be measured or possessed in great quantity, but as a lived trust expressed daily in service, obedience, and love?

This is why on this World Communion Sunday, our sermon title is *Faith Feeds the Journey.* We are reminded through our scripture text this morning that faith is not always dramatic, nor does it always feel sufficient. At times it may seem no more than a whisper, no larger than a mustard seed. And yet, even that is enough, not because of the faith itself, but because of the God in whom our faith is rooted. Remember, it is not the size of our faith that sustains us, but the One in whom our faith is placed. If we have faith that trusts like a mustard seed, small, yet living, growing, adapting, and firmly planted in and through Christ, it will feed us and our journey ahead.

Faith then becomes the daily bread that nourishes us and sustains us along the way—not because it is impressive or abundant, but because it roots us in the steadfastness of God, who is always abundant and always faithful. It does not depend upon grand gestures or heroic moments, but is revealed in ordinary, steadfast practices of trust and obedience, which includes forgiving when forgiveness feels costly, showing mercy when judgment or resentment would be easier, speaking truth in love when silence would be more comfortable, holding one another accountable with grace, and returning again and again to Christ's table where we are fed and strengthened for the

road ahead, and nourished by Christ' presence. And as we come to Christ's table today, joining with Christians around the globe and across generations, may we hear Christ's words again: you already have the faith you need. Now live it out.

Amen.