

Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost

DOING WHAT WE OUGHT TO HAVE DONE

Luke 17:5-10

Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 22)

Analysis by Lori A. Cornell

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 "Who among you would say to your slave, who has just come in from plowing or tending sheep in the field, 'Come here at once and take your place at the table'? 8 Would you not rather say to him, 'Prepare supper for me, put on your apron and serve me while I eat and drink; later you may eat and drink'? 9 Do you thank the slave for doing what was commanded? 10 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!'"

DIAGNOSIS: Not Worthy of the Task

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) – *Scared*

Maybe it's Jesus' warning in the verses previous to these that scare the disciples into pleading, "Increase our faith!" After all, the idea of a millstone being hung around one's neck (v. 2)

can cause discomfort. Or maybe the disciples are feeling inadequate to the leadership challenge Jesus has made, and that causes them to place the burden back on him: “[You] increase our faith!” In any case, Jesus confirms that the disciples have good reason to be scared, since their faith is smaller than a mustard seed.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) – *Not Doing What They Ought*

But is the problem that they lack faith in themselves? No. Actually the problem is they lack faith in Jesus. Enough so that Jesus warns them not to cause others to stumble (v. 2). In other words, not only are they failing to follow Jesus effectively themselves, but they risk tripping others up too-getting in the way of Jesus’ mission. Rather than expecting to serve Jesus (like the slave in his analogy, v. 8), they expect Jesus to serve their purposes.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) – *Worthless*

What good are servants who get in the way? What good are slaves who think themselves worthy of commanding the master? They are worthless.

PROGNOSIS: The Worthy One Does the Task

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) – *The Slave, Doing What is Required*

The astounding thing about Jesus’ rather abrasive description of how a servant should behave, is that he responds to it-not by demanding the disciples to fulfill it-but by modeling exactly what he says is required: Jesus does what we ought to have done (v. 10). Paul describes Jesus’ incredible service so beautifully in Philippians 2:6: “who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave.” What Jesus demands of servants, he fulfills humbly. Jesus serves his disciples, and

most especially the “little ones” of the world, by doing what we cannot do: He exemplifies faith in his Father’s will—a faith greater than a mustard seed, that culminates in the ultimate service; and that service results in his suffering and death, and motivates his Father to raise him from the dead.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) – *Let Us Serve You, Jesus*

Such humble and compassionate service can’t help but change hearts, even “increase faith.” It changed the first disciples’ hearts—Peter, for instance, was a new man after Jesus’ death and resurrection. But it does more than wow us. It makes us want to rest in the Master’s care, and do as the Master says, to “put on an apron and serve [him]” (v. 8). Not because we must—for we trust that this Master is gracious enough to give us a permanent place in the household; but we serve out of gratitude, and a desire to be close to our Master’s purposes.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) – *We’ve Only Done What We Ought*

Jesus isn’t the only one whom we servants have our eye on, though. Certainly Jesus inspires the service, but secondarily so do those others whom Jesus cares for. Remember? The “little ones” (v. 2), are on Jesus’ agenda always, and so—in service to him—they are in our sight as well. The little ones need to experience the Master’s compassion, and receive the master’s forgiveness (v. 4), and taste his mercy, and hear about what kind of God Jesus is. So, with our faith increased by Jesus’ humbling mercy, we care for his little ones. We do this not because we are worthy (v. 10), but because Jesus is, and we are just doing what servants do.