

Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost

Freed from Ourselves

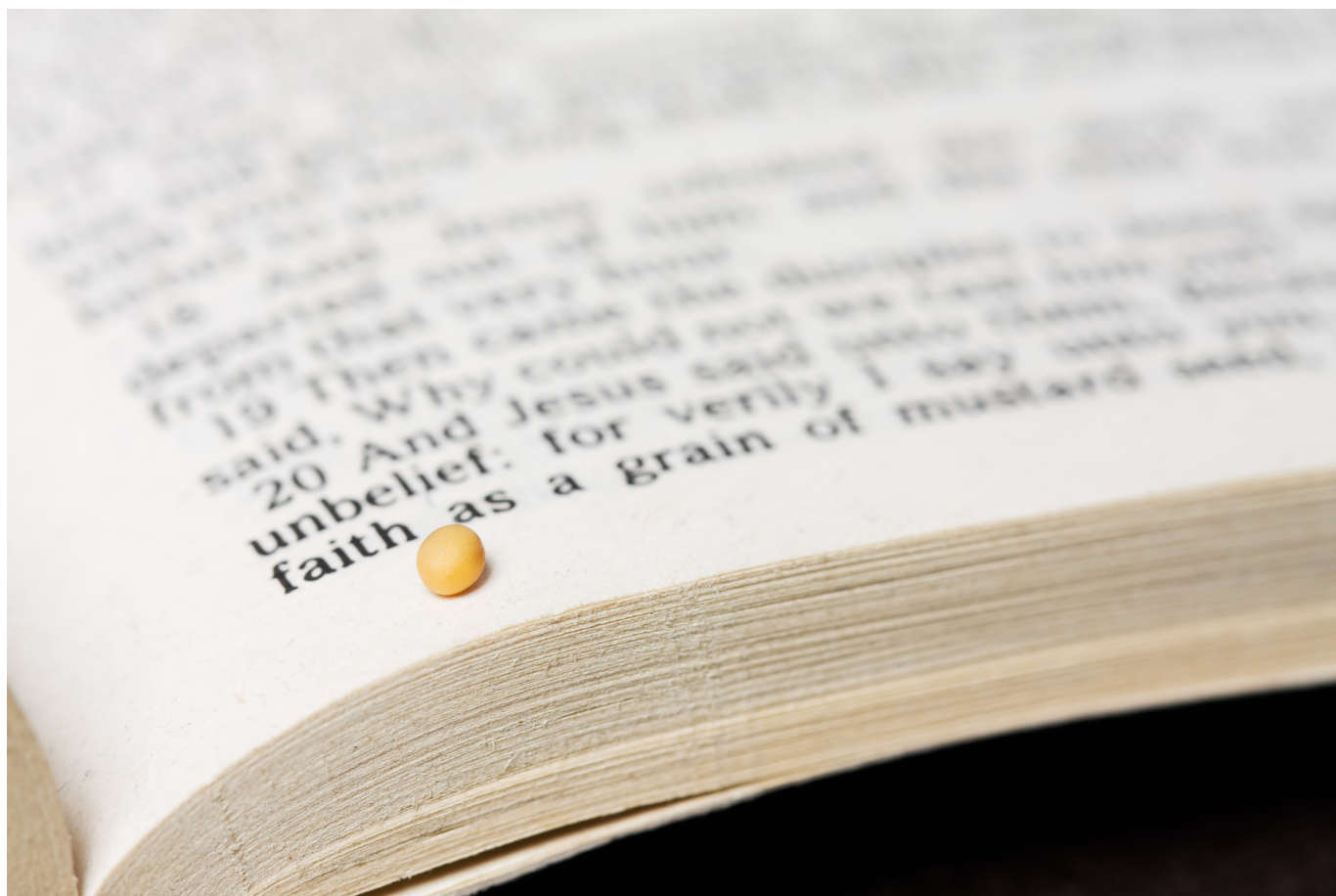
Luke 17:5-10

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Analysis by Jonas Ellison

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

7Who 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'? 8Would 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'? 9Do you thank the slave for doing what was commanded? 10So 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!'"



Faith Mustard Seed (from Canva)

“God removes our hearts of stone that turn against our selves and each other and replaces them with beating hearts of flesh. He liberates us from our identity as slaves. In turn, we no longer need to project that slavery onto others. Jesus frees us for the world. ”

DIAGNOSIS:

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): Grasping for Control

By default, we are egocentric creatures and the main characters of our own life stories. Why would we think otherwise? We're with and inside of ourselves in every moment of our lives. We

are bound to the notion that we are our own gods and the arbiters of life. When life shows us that it cannot be controlled, we reach and grasp for control even more. Even when we turn to faith or spirituality, it's usually done in order to wrest control of our lives. We can sense this desperation in the questions the disciples pose to Jesus in today's passage about how they can have more faith so that they can do all of the miraculous things that Jesus speaks of, like commanding mulberry trees to be uprooted and planted in the sea with the flick of a finger. With more faith, maybe I could pay my bills without stress. Maybe my parasitical addiction will go away. Maybe my child will come out of his room and tell me what's wrong. Sometimes prayer works, but more often it doesn't. How much faith do I need to get this life to budge in my desired direction, Lord?!

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem): An Unsustainable Way of Life

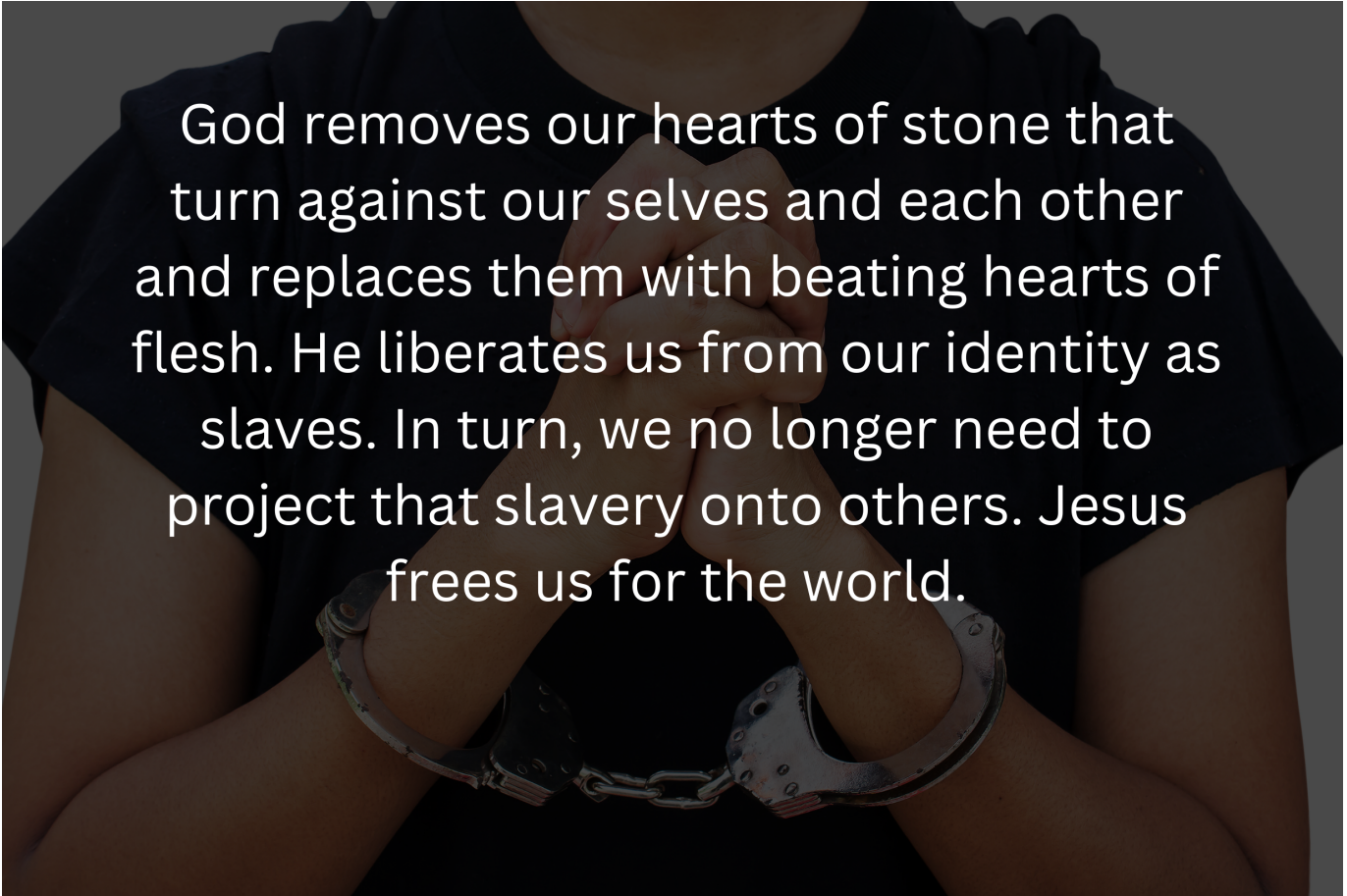
This default way of living is destined to be wrought with anxiety and strife. Life is quick to teach us that we have control over very little. We are not the creators of the world, nor are we even our own individual creators. Living as if we are gods is a delusional way to relate to life. It's like the pot saying that the potter did not make it (Isaiah 29:16). As pots, we will never be the potters of our lives, even though we might cling to the delusion that we are.

The problem comes when we take for granted the gifts that life brings us. When we fall into the delusion that we deserve the good things, we start to believe that we can "manifest" them on demand. If we cannot manifest more good into our lives through worldly means of power, we tend to strive for it through spiritual means. Our modern secular spirituality is rife with "manifesting our reality." But again, this is living against the

grain of how God made the world and the role humans have in it.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): Jesus Won't Let Us Be Our Own Gods

When the disciples express this urge to control more of their lives to Jesus, he refuses to engage. If faith is trust that God is God and we are not, Jesus sees that the disciples are going in the wrong direction. They are trying to use Jesus as their own spiritual slot machine. He tells them that they have zero faith—not even a mustard seed's worth. In typical Jesus-fashion, he amps up the law to bring an end to the delusional self-godly ways they are enslaved to. In their enslavement to glory, they project this enslavement onto their fellow humans.

A person with their hands clasped in prayer, wearing metal handcuffs, symbolizing liberation from slavery.

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Freed from slavery (from Canva)

PROGNOSIS:

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): Give it Up

Jesus holds a mirror up to our self-godly ways as enslavement to the law. We have trespassed into territory that doesn't belong to us. We have crossed over from being created beings into striving to be gods. Jesus puts this tendency to death by showing us that we cannot take even one more step in that direction. He does this to set us free of it. We are destroying ourselves and shalom with our neighbors. Jesus's blessing disabuses us of this. All we can do is give up the ruse and surrender into the arms of God that stands before us in Jesus.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): Rest at Last

When God in Jesus, working through the Holy Spirit, brings us to the end of our delusional self-godly ways, it's like an ontological weight has been lifted from our shoulders. Jesus frees us from the myth that we are in control of our lives and takes the burden upon himself in his death and resurrection. The god-trespassing part of us dies and we are given the heartfelt desire to trust in our creator to provide for us. We begin to trust that God is working in our lives to bring us closer to the heart of life itself. God removes our hearts of stone that turn against our selves and each other and replaces them with beating hearts of flesh. He liberates us from our identity as slaves. In turn, we no longer need to project that slavery onto others. Jesus frees us for the world.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): Living as Free Humans in Love

When the desire to control our lives and others is taken away, we are given our wholeness/righteousness back. Whole creatures can only do one thing... Love! We fall back in love with our lives

and with those in it. We fall in love with the night sky, the sunrise, and the created world we inhabit. We invite the servant to the table with us and have the best meal ever. We live with grateful hearts. Our past life, which was seen as a burden to mitigate, has been taken away. A new life has been given to us as a gift. We awaken that with Jesus at the helm, it is all a gift.