



CROSSINGS Connection

WHERE THE GOSPEL MEETS OUR DAILY LIVES

MICHAELMAS 2022 | Vol. 147 | From the Crossings Community, Inc

Luke 17:1-10 – Gospel Reading for the 18th Sunday after Pentecost

Increase Our Faith

Some commentators suggest this text consists of unconnected sayings of Jesus dropped by Luke into chapter 17. I don't think this is necessarily the case. However, so much is going on in the text, I do suggest the reader take the time to read the text.

By the Rev. Bruce K. Modahl

The apostles said to Jesus, "Increase our faith." It was more plea than request. Jesus threatened them with millstones and drowning. He then prescribed around-the-clock forgiveness. To avoid the first and achieve the latter, the disciples pleaded, "Increase our faith."

What sort of answer is this that Jesus gave to the disciples? "If you had faith the size of a mustard seed, you could command mulberry trees to uproot and plant them in the sea." It is a small mustard seed, but a big *if*.

I think Jesus started out with the *if* because it was implicit in the disciples' understanding of faith. *If* you just had more faith, you could forgive as Jesus commands and transplant mulberry trees without a shovel. *If* you only had more faith, your cancer would be cured. The reason you are struggling financially is you

don't have enough faith. You would not be so anxious *if* you had more faith.

There is no good news in this *if*. There is only judgment and more guilt for the problems we have, which we wouldn't have

if only we had more faith.

Jesus starts out with his *if* because it exposes our desire to save ourselves. We say we are saved by faith and not by our works. The *if* turns faith into our good work, something we have to do and we have to get. If we only knew the secret formula, we could get Jesus to cough up a sufficient supply of it. Obviously,
(see page 2)



Gathering and Celebrating

With support, interest, and involvement from you and others, Crossings continues to be active and lively. It is encouraging to see all the new writers for the weekly text studies and the Thursday Theology postings. The line-up of presenters and responders for the monthly Table Talk discussions has been impressive. And the bi-weekly book group carries on with faithful attendance.

And now we celebrate someone who has been deeply engaged in all this work: Jerry Burce, president of Crossings. We look forward to Jerry's leadership as he moves into what will surely be a productive period for him—and for Crossings.

Please plan now to join Jerry and others who will gather for our 2023 conference. As you can see from the enclosed insert, the schedule is a feast of theological reflection—with lots of opportunities for prayer, praise, and informal discussion.

Thank you for continuing to be part of this community of faith and learning.



Sherman Lee
Executive Director

Increase Our Faith

(from page 1)

the plea, “Increase our faith,” is not the secret formula. Jesus grabs our faith by the *if* and redirects it from us to him.

In response to the disciples’ question, Jesus said, “*If* you had faith as a grain of mustard seed...” Jesus is the one who plants the mustard seed to which the kingdom of God and now our faith are compared. It is the smallest of seeds, but it grows into a great bush offering shelter and nesting places to the birds of the air.

The kingdom of God starts small. It looks inconsequential. But it offers shelter from the storm and an eternal home to us. As sure as Jesus rose from the grave, that seed of faith grows out of the “tomb wherein he lay.” God’s faithfulness to us in Jesus Christ is where that seed germinates.

So, when in faith we tie the millstone around the neck of that old Adam and Eve in us and push that sinned-filled head under water and we do it for the seventh time today, don’t go looking for a reward. We have only done our duty.

When that chronic offender comes to us yet

again saying, “Sorry,” and we forgive him yet again, let’s not expect a star in our crown. We’ve only done what is expected.

When we go after the little ones we have caused to stumble and ask their forgiveness we are only doing what Jesus’ servants do.

And when someone is living through a depression and we are present with that person in God’s name and we keep visiting and calling, no one is going to host an awards banquet for us.

When we sit at the hospice bedside of a man who is too young with children who are too young for him to be dying and we read to him Romans 8, “Nothing can separate us from the love of God, neither death nor life.” And we sing in choked-up voices at his bedside when he can only mouth the words, “I know that my redeemer lives.” You don’t even want a pat on the back for that because you had the privilege of embodying God’s presence and promise to a dying man.

When we do these things, we are living within the sturdy branches of God’s own faithfulness to us. God’s faithfulness is more than enough.

41 Years of Ministry: A Passion for the Gospel

Ever since Ed Schroeder retired as editor of Thursday Theology in 2011 after 700 consecutive online postings, the Rev. Dr. Jerome (Jerry) Burce has been co-editor or editor of Thursday Theology. In recent years, Jerry has also served as president of the Crossings board of directors.

This summer, Jerry retired from a career of 41 years in Word and Sacrament ministry. He spent the final 28 years as pastor of Messiah Lutheran Church in Fairview Park, Ohio, a suburb of Cleveland.

Pastor Burce began his ministry in Papua New Guinea, the place where he was born and where his father served his entire ministry.

From 1974 to 1980 the Gutnius Lutheran Church–Papua New Guinea recruited eight graduates of Christ Seminary–Seminex to serve as missionaries. Jerry was the final graduate called.

Jerry served on a bishop's staff, visiting congregations and leading in-service training for congregational evangelists. He then became a lecturer and later the principal at Timothy Lutheran Seminary. The seminary provided basic scriptural and theological instruction for men who could read and write New Guinea Pidgin English and wished to be pastors. Jerry said it was here that the gospel “left the prison of my head and slipped down into my gut. The gospel became more than words. It became reality.”

After 6 ½ years in Papua New Guinea, Jerry accepted a call to Zion Lutheran Church in Southington, Connecticut. During this time, he earned his DMin degree from Hartford Seminary.

His DMin thesis became a book, *Proclaiming the Scandal: Reflections on Postmodern Ministry*.

After some years, Jerry and his family wanted to be closer to their families in the Midwest. In 1994 he visited several bishop's offices. The bishop's assistant in the Northeast Ohio Synod sent his name to Messiah in Fairview Park, Ohio. Jerry received and accepted the call to Messiah.

Carol Braun joined Messiah, Fairview Park with her family when she was in eighth grade. She calls Jerry a wordsmith. She describes his sermons as having the substance which continues to shape her faith. During her high school years, Jerry listened to her and gave thoughtful responses to her questions about being a Christian in a non-Christian world.

In summary, Carol says what she hears from Jerry is that every human is very precious to God. Our response is to love God back. Out of this flows a new way of thinking and feeling.

The Rev. Matt Metevelis joined Messiah with his family when he was in high school. At Messiah his family heard the gospel in its fullness. He said Jerry's preaching is an encounter with God, who loves and suffers for us.

When Matt was eighteen, Jerry sat down next to him in the church narthex and asked him if he had given thought to being a pastor. Matt said the
(see page 4)



FAR LEFT:
Pastor Jerry Burce and Nancy, his wife, with their children and grandchildren, who gathered to celebrate Jerry's retirement.

LEFT:
The Rev. Seth Bridger, Jerry's colleague at Messiah, presided at the liturgy for Jerry's farewell.

Photos © AzkaLynn Photography

A Passion for the Gospel

(from page 3)

question came at a time when he was thinking about *not* wanting to do that. After college, Matt began working at his high school alma mater, St. Ignatius in Cleveland. He talked to students about their faith. He realized talking to people about their faith is what he wanted to do.

While at seminary, Matt sent his first sermon to Jerry for critique. Jerry responded, calling the sermon a brilliant failure. Jerry went on to say, “Make that God utterly *pro nobis*. When you have done that, you are ready to preach. God is here. God is utterly for us.”

Ron Coulter is a member at Messiah and has served as assisting minister for over 15 years. In that capacity, Ron says he could always tell if Jerry was preaching that Sunday. Jerry would pace in the sacristy, muttering to himself, and scribbling notes on the bulletin.

Ron was a small group Bible study leader at Messiah. He was interested in learning more theology and decided to attend the Crossings conference in 2015.

Ron remembers Jerry’s keynote address from that conference. The topic was “Unearthing Gospel Gold.” Ron calls it an epiphany. He wrote, “It was the first time I understood that the distinction between law and gospel is important because only the gospel changes hearts.”

Cathy Lessmann, Crossings executive secretary, attests to her confidence in Jerry’s leadership. She says he is passionate about the gospel. His sermons and writing are winsome, articulate, entertaining, and spot on.

Jerry has not retired from Crossings. He says he is now free from his responsibilities at a busy parish and will devote his time and



Photo © AzkaLynn Photography

Pastor Jerry Burce and his granddaughter, Elena Burce, pose next to a photo of Jerry from 1994, the year he began his ministry at Messiah.

energy to Crossings. According to Jerry, Crossings has done a good job serving those who already know this theology. The challenge over the next years—one Jerry is eager to take on—will be to infect a younger generation with the gospel that makes our hearts glad.

Thank You! We’re Halfway There!

Thanks to many of those involved in Crossings, more than \$12,000 has been contributed to match the challenge grant of \$25,000 from Kathy and Mark Helge. Their gift and the matching gifts received will help fund scholarships and other activities for the 2023 Crossings Conference, January 22-25, 2023.

If you haven’t already, please help us meet this challenge by making a tax-deductible gift to Crossings today at crossings.org/give. Or you may mail your gift to PO Box 7011, St. Louis, MO 63006.

Help make the
2023 Conference
available to the
widest possible
audience.

Thank you!



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QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

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