

October 2nd, 2022
Communion

Luke 17:5-10

“Clean Your Room!”

How many of you *like* to be told what to do? I was once told that I might have a problem with authority. All I could think was, “*doesn’t everyone?*” As far as I can tell we can take the joy out of something just by telling someone they have to do it. I remember as a child hating to clean my room...which I had been told was a requirement. But if I was at a friend’s house – well – that was entirely different. Helping them clean their room, wash the driveway, spread manure on the lawn. It was all good fun. And part of the fun, I think, was being happy to help without being told I had to.

Jesus tells his disciples at the beginning of chapter 17 that they have responsibilities to *not trip up other people in their life of faith* and *forgive one another* when the need pops up. Knowing how hard both of those things are, the disciples ask for more faith so they can be up to the task. Wouldn’t you think that kind of request would get a solid, “Well done friends, here you go.” From Jesus? *They asked for something positive* – and as we hear this text it sounds as if Jesus might be saying, “*If you didn’t need more faith, you could do great things.*” Thanks for the help.

We hear that because, like the disciples *we imagine faith can be quantified*. Is the glass half empty or full? Jesus’ answer leads us away from our assumption that faith is like gas in the car or food in our belly *which can be measured*. Jesus encourages us to see faith not as an acquired good - but as being our connection to God – *our orientation to life*. It isn’t about *having* so much as *being*. Being the one who belongs to God – the only one who can do anything.

Our belonging to God is *relational* not instrumental. That’s what the discussion of the *master and the slave* is all about. Jesus knew his followers had grown up in a culture in which everyone understood religious leaders service to God also gave them status and standing. We don’t have this much in our culture – but it was strong enough in those days for Jesus to warn his followers that *our faith is about our connection to God – not our relative worth one to another*. We are not in competition with one another here in worship – our purpose is the same.

We are the servants – we are the ones who have as our life mission serving God who made us and loves us best. But this passage sounds tough, doesn't it? *Oh boy – I get to be a slave – a useless servant! Sign me up twice!*

That second part of today's passage is pretty forceful. Which of you – having a servant – acts as a servant to your servant? Everyone there listening knew the answer was, "no one." Jesus is using an illustration from everyday life to bring us to greater **clarity about our relationship with God.**

In our faith tradition we have historic emphasis of faith including **the majesty of God and the sovereignty of God.** These are ways we remember that God is not just a big one of us – and it isn't our place to try and take God's place.

We serve God, not the other way around. There is never a point at which God owes us. Yet, it has always struck me as harsh to be told I should consider myself a "useless" servant. Most of us don't want to be told what to do, and neither is it motivating to be told *what we do doesn't matter* – why try?

A more useful translation would be "**unprofitable**" as opposed to "useless." Unprofitable meaning, we understand our service to God is *given in gratitude* and **not for the purpose of gaining profit** for ourselves. This not only fits with the word but also with Jesus' story. We can even say that this story from Jesus is a defining moment...a moment in which he is teaching us **not to define ourselves** by the religious examples who understand that if they do enough – perhaps God will owe them.

All of our opportunities for life as God's children come with the joy of serving God who loved us first – not being told what we have to do, or we are in trouble. As God's children, we will know what we ought to have done when we understand that life is one big opportunity, and our best path is pleasing God – not because we have to – but because we get to.