

Reflections on Sunday's Readings: October 6, 2019

Twenty-Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time [C]

Habakkuk 1: 2-3; 2: 2-4

2 Timothy 1: 6-8, 13-14

Luke 17: 5-10



Wild mustard: photo by Petr Pakandl

Bundles of Vitality for Peacemaking

Introduction

Luke continues to invite us along with Jesus on his journey to Jerusalem. This second part of Luke is Jesus resolutely heading to Jerusalem where he knows he will likely lay down his life for all of us. Along the way he offers to his disciples various insights into “discipleship.” He is offering to them and to us what it means to follow him and walk in his Spirit and in his faith.

Just before the Gospel passage we heard today, Jesus has been speaking about human brokenness. He knows we will not be perfect in this life, and he offers that mercy is the core of the Gospel. Jesus offers that there will be times to speak truth to one another when someone is getting off the path of faith; and then he says that even if someone offends you seven times in the same day, offer them forgiveness.

When the disciples hear his words and his examples here, they say to him “increase our faith,” Lord. They realize the difficulty in what he is saying, and they ask him to “add to their faith!” They are wondering how they are to do all that he is speaking about.

Jesus replies that it is not a matter of “more” faith, but rather a matter of trusting and using the faith that has been given to you. He is basically saying to them: ‘You have the gift of faith in you. This is plenty.’

Mustard Seed Faith

Jesus then uses the image of a mustard seed. One writer on this passage encourages us to imagine Jesus as a young boy and as a young man seeing the mustard seed bushes growing everywhere. These bushes would be along the road and by the rivers, and they would cross over into the planted fields.

The mustard seeds are **“bundles of vitality,”** and like the seeds of our dandelions, they grow wherever they blow and travel. They are waiting to flourish in whatever soil they land.

Jesus offers then that this is similar to the gift of faith within them. If you have a “mustard seed” of faith in you, he is saying, you can lift up a mulberry tree and send it flying. Now, from his experience and the experience of his hearers, they know the mulberry tree has a vast root system and is very hard to dig up and move. He is not really talking about flying trees, but what Jesus is saying is that with the faith you have in you, you can untangle hurts and brokenness, sin and injustice.

With the faith you have received, you share in my power for good, Jesus offers. What seems impossible to do is in your ability as given by Christ. You will be able to keep on forgiving and healing your life and your community’s life because I will keep forgiving you and blessing you with my love. My love will empower you, trust me. There may be some “waiting” or time involved, but I will give you what you need for the healing of the world.

All is Gift

Then Jesus offers another image which is somewhat difficult to understand because of the context of “master and servant or slave.” The wording is also difficult for us today.

We know Jesus is not speaking against being grateful. Jesus himself serves his disciples breakfast and cares for them. Remember he will wash their feet at the Last Supper, and this would not have been a perfunctory washing of their feet. He very likely took time to say farewell to each of them with this gesture and added a unique word or gesture for each one. We might imagine him saying something like ‘I am very grateful for you, and I will miss you. But I must go and complete my mission.’

But what he is pointing to in these words is that **“all is gift, all is grace.”** As you follow me and live your faith, I will be alive in you; and you will come to know your true humanity and your true divinity. This is all God’s doing, and it is wondrous to behold.

This is not about earning “extra credit” for what we are doing or earning our way to heaven. We are not owed anything for walking the journey of faith because the journey of faith is so rich with God’s love for us and rich with our blossoming into our full humanity and divinity.

As we walk by faith in Christ, we grow and develop; and we grow deeper in love with God, with ourselves, and with one another. The “kingdom of God” flourishes and comes to life in us and around us. This is what Jesus is hoping we will all see: **all is gift!**

Peace Prayer of St. Francis

A final thought: this week I have been thinking a lot about St. Francis with the celebration of his “Transitus” (his passing) and his feast day. I came back to his “peace prayer.” This was not written by St. Francis. It comes later in time, but it certainly speaks to his spirit and vision.

It also expresses in prayer someone who “gets” what faith is all about and how all is graciousness and gift because of God’s love for us.

I sent this prayer to several family members and friends for the feast day, and my sister, Phyllis, wrote back to me that when she taught at Immaculate Conception School she would use this prayer with her students all during the month of October. I thought what a good idea and so wonderful to introduce the students to St. Francis’ spirituality in this way.

I’d like to pray this prayer for us now, and I invite us to meditate on it during this month.

The Prayer of St. Francis

**Lord, make me an instrument of Your peace;
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
Where there is injury, pardon;
Where there is doubt, faith;
Where there is despair, hope;
Where there is darkness, light;
And where there is sadness, joy.**

**O Divine Master,
Grant that I may not so much seek
To be consoled as to console;
To be understood, as to understand;
To be loved, as to love;
For it is in giving that we receive,
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
And it is in dying that we are born to Eternal Life.
Amen**

