**A reading from the Gospel of Luke, chapter 17,**

**beginning to read at verse 5.**

“If your brother or sister[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+17&version=NIV#fen-NIV-25655a)] sins against you, rebuke them; and if they repent, forgive them.

**4** Even if they sin against you seven times in a day and seven times come back to you saying ‘I repent,’ you must forgive them.”

**5** The apostles said to the Lord, **“Increase our faith!”**

**6** He replied, **“If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and it will obey you.**

**7** “Suppose one of you has a servant ploughing or looking after the sheep. Will he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, ‘Come along now and sit down to eat’? **8**

Won’t he rather say, ‘Prepare my supper, get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink’?

 **9** Will he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do?

**10** So you also, when you have done everything, you were told to do, should say, **‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.’”**

SERMON:

Today it’s Harvest Festival and we are celebrating God’s generosity in providing all that we need.

It is also the 16th Sunday after Trinity and our readings talk about FAITH.

The disciples said to Jesus, **"Increase our faith!"**

What led to their request?  At the beginning of this chapter Jesus had said:

**"It is impossible that no occasions of stumbling should come, but woe to him THROUGH WHOM they come!**

**It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea,**

**rather than that he should cause one of these little ones to stumble"**

So the disciples said, **"Lord, increase our faith."**

I am sure they were thinking, "Wow!  That's a lot to ask!  How can we avoid ever causing a little one to stumble?  That’s a tough requirement, Jesus.  Increase our faith so that we can do it.  We can't do it on our own."

Then Jesus said:

 **"Be careful. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him.**

**If he repents, forgive him.**

**If he sins against you seven times in the day,**

**and seven times returns, saying, 'I repent,'**

**you shall forgive him"** (17:3-4).

So the disciples said, "Lord, increase our faith."  I am sure they were thinking, "Wow!  That's a lot to ask!

How can we forgive someone who sins against us seven times in one day?

You’re asking the impossible, Jesus – so increase our faith so that we can do the impossible.  We can't do it on our own."

"Lord, increase our faith!  Help us!  Make it possible for us to live up to your impossible standards!  Save us from being merely human!  Save us, Lord!"

 It isn't unusual for people to feel overwhelmed when faced with the things that Jesus said.  The Sermon on the Mount is a good example.  Jesus said:

**"Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, there is no way you will enter into the Kingdom of Heaven"** (Matthew 5:20).

"Lord, increase our faith!"  We can't do that on our own.  We can't be more righteous than these super-righteous men.  Help us, Lord!  "Increase our faith."

Jesus also said:

 **But I tell you, love your enemies,**

**bless those who curse you,**

**do good to those who hate you,**

**and pray for those who mistreat you and persecute you,**

**that you may be children of your Father who is in heaven"**

(Matthew 5:43-45).

Lord, have mercy!  We can't love our enemies.  We have enough trouble loving our friends. Help us, Lord!  "Increase our faith!"

 In the movie, *Robin Hood*, Robin (played by Kevin Costner) approaches a young man getting ready to shoot an arrow at a target.

Robin asks, **"Can you shoot amid distractions?"**  That was a good question, because the young man might be asked to go to war with his bow and arrow.  There are lots of distractions in war.  "Can you shoot amid distractions?"

Then, just before the young man released his arrow, Robin reached over and tickled his ear with a feather, and the young man missed the target by several feet.  Everyone had a good laugh at the young man's expense.

But then Maid Marian asked Robin, **"Can you?"**  Can you shoot amid distractions, Robin?  Can you do what you were challenging this young man to do?

So Robin takes his bow and arrow and prepares to shoot at the target.  But just as he releases the arrow, Marian leans over and blows playfully into his face.  Robin not only misses the target, but his arrow almost kills a bystander.

Lord, have mercy**!  "Lord, increase our faith!"  Temptation overwhelms us. Lord, help us!  Lord, save us!**

 But it isn't just base temptations––sex, money, and drugs––that threaten to undo us.  It is also the temptation to do good things.

Thomas a Kempis put it this way.  He said:

**"The devil is continually tempting thee**

**to seek HIGH things,**

**to go after HONOURS."**

I'm reminded of an old cartoon.  The devil is standing in front of an executive's desk.  A window looks out on the executive's domain – factories, chimneys.  The devil is obviously trying to find the executive's price.  He asks, "What about your picture on the cover of *Time* magazine?"

It happens even in churches.  Someone gets an idea about how we could do it better, and starts rolling over other people, trying to get people to do it his (or her) way.

Too many times, we are tempted to say, **"My way or no way!"**

People like that offend other people, who then leave the church – sometimes for another church, but often for no church at all.

The people with the Big Idea – convinced that they are doing the right thing – often split churches and make life difficult for all of us.

**Lord have mercy!  "Lord, increase our faith!"  Lord, help us!  Lord, save us!**

 When the disciples said, "Increase our faith," Jesus responded with these words.  He said:

**"If you had faith like a grain of mustard seed,**

**you would tell this sycamore tree, 'Be uprooted,**

**and be planted in the sea,'**

**and it would obey you"** (v. 6).

Now that isn't how we wanted Jesus to respond.  When the disciples said, **"Increase our faith,"** we wanted Jesus to increase their faith.  We wanted him to wave a wand over their heads and endow them magically with great faith.

We wanted him to say something clever that would **"buck them up"** – that would give them sudden insight – **that would increase their faith.**

But Jesus didn't do that.

• He told them that they wouldn't have to become spiritual giants.  They wouldn't have to possess towering faith.

All they would need is **faith the size of a mustard seed**, one of the world's smallest seeds.

• If they could develop even that tiny bit of faith, they would tap into God's power so that they could say to a tree,

**"Be uprooted and be planted in the sea,"** and the tree would do that.

Did Jesus mean that literally?

**Did He mean that we could SHA-ZAMM a tree to make it jump out of the ground and plant itself in the sea?**

Perhaps Jesus was using hyperbole - dramatic language -exaggerated language.

Perhaps He was using the image of a tree jumping out of the ground to teach the disciples something important - that even tiny faith could give them great power, that even tiny faith could help them tap into **God's power.**

But let us remember an important fact.  Jesus DID GIVE the disciples the great faith that they wanted.  He just didn't do it straightaway.

It would not be until the resurrection that the disciples would get the boost in faith that they were asking.  After they saw the risen Christ, they became men and women of huge –world-changing faith.

Before the resurrection, they hid in a locked room for fear that the people who killed Jesus would come after them next.

After the resurrection, they left their locked room and went out into the streets of Jerusalem, where Peter preached a great sermon and the disciples baptized three thousand people.

Those disciples went on from there to plant churches in place after place.  These ordinary men and women started something that affects us even today – even in Tylers Green.  The faith of those men and woman allowed them to tap into God's power and to change the world.

 Jesus didn't wave a wand over them.  He helped them to grow into faith.

And so it is with us.

We are growing in faith right now – here in this service –singing hymns of faith – listening to the scriptures - thanking God for the harvest

Jesus helps to increase our faith in a thousand different ways:

• He increases our faith every time we make a decision to act in faith.

• He increases our faith when we read the scriptures – or pray – or talk about spiritual things with another person.

• Sometimes Jesus increases our faith by letting us fall flat on our face – by letting us suffer the consequences of our actions.  Jesus sometimes hands out **Tough Love**, just to help us grow.

Every day is an opportunity to grow in faith.

Every day is an opportunity for Christ to help us grow.

Every day is an opportunity to exercise our faith.

And once we have faith even the size of a tiny mustard seed, Jesus promises:

**"You can tell this sycamore tree,**

**'Be uprooted, and be planted in the sea,'**

**and it will obey you"** (v. 6).

It might take a lifetime of growing in faith before we see that happen – but Christ promises that, with God's help and a little faith on our part, everything is possible.